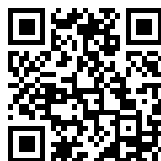


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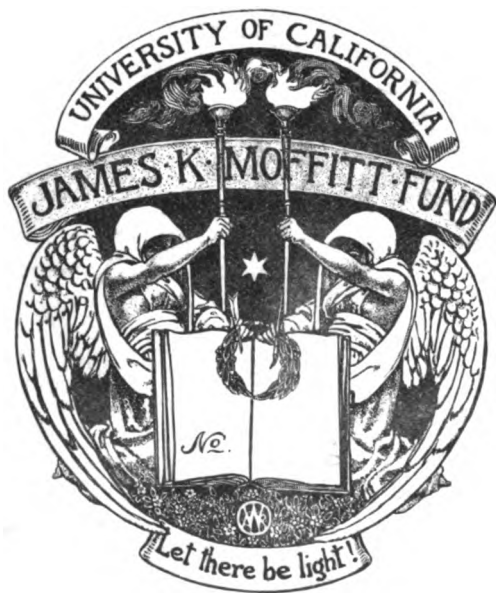
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# **THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES**

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# THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

## AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

ALICE GARDNER

‘‘

LECTURER AND ASSOCIATE OF NEWNHAM COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE  
AUTHOR OF "JULIAN THE PHILOSOPHER,"  
"STUDIES IN JOHN THE SOOT," ETC.

*προσεύξομαι τῷ πνεύματι προσεύξομαι δὲ καὶ τῷ νοῦ*



LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN  
PATERNOSTER SQUARE  
1903

**MOFFIT**

**TO THOSE  
STUDENTS OF NEWNHAM COLLEGE  
FOR WHOM THESE ESSAYS WERE WRITTEN  
THEY ARE AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED  
BY THE AUTHOR.**

## PREFACE

---

IN offering to the general public any work originally intended for a small and private audience, one feels bound to introduce it with a word of apology. My apology is simply this: that I found among friends and pupils who had heard these papers some who desired to possess them in a permanent form;—and also that I ventured to hope that what had proved suggestive and helpful to them might be of use and of interest to others also.

A word or two on the original purpose of these papers is required to explain their general character. With the exception of two (that on “Truthfulness,” read to the college section of the British College Christian Union, and that on “Christianity as a Historical Religion,” not written for any particular occasion), they have all been read at the Sunday afternoon meetings of a society of students of Newnham College. The members of this society were not all of one way of thinking or of up-bringing;—they belonged to various Churches or to no Church, pursued various lines of study, and differed greatly in their acquaintance with the world and with books. In writing papers for such an audience, one naturally tried to keep on ground that was common to the larger number, and to throw out suggestions for

## PREFACE

the more independent thinkers without becoming unintelligible or repellent to such as had not looked far beyond the traditional landmarks.

I had originally thought of revising these papers so as to omit what was peculiar to the occasion. On further consideration, however, it seemed to me that the elimination of local colour would only lead to an insipidity uncompensated by any greater permanence of interest. I have, accordingly, while leaving out a few references and allusions, kept them in approximately their original form.

I need hardly say that both in reading these papers to the students and in offering them to a wider circle, my position has not been that of a teacher, but merely that of one who has had long experience of student life, and many opportunities, through reading, leisurely thinking, and intercourse with others who have thought more deeply, for considering the problems, religious and social, that press upon this generation. Probably no one who has realised what that pressure means is prepared with ready-made solutions, adapted to the needs of every inquiring mind. If, according to my earnest hope, these Essays prove helpful to any persons who are beginning to think for themselves, such help will not take the form of decisive answers, but rather of general indications along what lines and in what conditions each inquirer may hope to find his personal difficulties solved. My business is not to convey passengers along the main road, but to point out a few directing-posts, and perhaps to caution against a few blind alleys.

I have to express my very grateful thanks to friends whose help and encouragement have enabled me to complete this little work—in particular to the Rev.

## PREFACE

J. B. Mayor, to my brother, Professor Percy Gardner, and to Miss Melian Stawell, for criticisms and suggestions ;—also to Miss Flora Mayor for her active assistance in preparation for publication. But I cannot enumerate all whose sympathy has been felt by me during the long period in which I have, from time to time, endeavoured to stimulate and direct the minds of our students towards what seemed to me the ways of reasonable living and the faithful quest of truth. The ready response I have always met with from those women for whom I have tried to do some small service encourages me to hope that they, and the like-minded persons to whom these Essays are offered, will pardon their many defects and approve their general purport.

ALICE GARDNER.

NEWMHAM COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.  
*October, 1902.*

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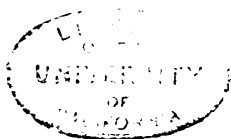
**I**

***THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES***

**1**

**B**





# I

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

**T**HE idea of the moral life as a conflict seems to have been familiar to man ever since he began to think about morals at all. In the old naturalistic religions, in which honour and gratitude, terror and propitiatory fear were paid to the beneficent and to the destructive powers of sunlight, tempest, and wind, there may have been originally no moral meaning whatever. But with the growth of civilisation, with the knowledge of good and evil, whatever may be the occasion of its first awakening, comes the tendency to interpret the struggles of light against darkness, life against death, as symbolising a mighty conflict always going on between the powers of good and of evil. And thus also the old mythical heroes who have subdued monsters and destroyed noisome beasts are raised to the rank of moral deliverers, who have fought for their fellow-men against misery, ignorance, and vice. Every man, as an individual moral being, has to make his choice, whether he will follow the blind leadings of appetite or the laborious paths of virtue and reason. In the early moralisings of the Greeks, we have the story of the Sophist Prodicus, how Heracles had to make his choice between Pleasure and Virtue, and similarly the choice of Paris shows us the conflicting

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

claims of Love, Dominion, and Valour. But where this view is to be insisted on, it is natural to make no mention of dissensions within the rival camps. Aretē and Athena were not to be regarded as divided in themselves or hesitating in their counsels. True, the Greeks held, as many thinkers must ever hold, that the meritorious acts of righteous men frequently draw down a terrible punishment on the virtuous transgressor of some neglected decree of fate. But this view belongs to the wider subject of the government of the world in relation to moral agency. Here we have to think not of the conflict between moral and non-moral force, but of the dissensions which seem to exist among the moral forces which direct the lives of right-minded men.

I say "seem to exist," because according to any theistic conception of the world, or, indeed, any rational scheme of life and its duties, such conflict cannot really be waged. The "stern daughter of the voice of God" cannot be divided against herself. Man cannot regard himself as bound to walk to the right and to the left at the same time. There are no such things as *duties* (in the plural) except as particular applications of general and broad principles, and the making of such applications lies within the power of our ordinary intellectual faculties. This seems a truism, and to men of strong mind and will the contrary view is inconceivable. We must all have known, or at least have read the lives of people who were never tormented with doubts as to the path they ought to pursue, who never flinched or felt a misgiving when they had once determined as to the right course of action. Such people would accept the statement of Bishop Butler: "The inquiries which have been made by men of leisure after some general rule, the conformity to or disagreement from which should

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

denominate our actions good or evil, are in many respects of great service. Yet let any plain, honest man, before he engages in any course of action, ask himself: Is this that I am going about right, or is it wrong? Is it good or is it evil? I do not in the least doubt but that this question would be answered agreeably to truth, by almost any fair man in almost any circumstances."

Butler's "plain, honest man" has formed the theme of much ethical controversy. His very existence has been questioned by some, though not improbably many of us may have known him personally or met with him in books. But I am inclined to think that the great bishop, being an eminently reasonable man himself, hardly realised how unreasonable were most of his fellow-mortals. For if things were as he says, should we so often hear the cry, from the lips of people who are undoubtedly plain, and think themselves honest: "I wish I knew what I ought to do"? Sophistry, the bias of strong inclination, inertia, or restlessness may often make weak men hesitate and violent men go astray. But even in ordinary, conscientious people, who want to do their best and have tried hard to clear away their prejudices and to look at things dispassionately and clearly, there still seems often a want of certainty as to present duty and many misgivings as to past actions.

With the former part of the great moralist's statement, however, we are all likely to agree. Inquiries into the general principles of morals, if "of great service," are useful to us as thinking rather than as active beings. They are occupation for "men of leisure." Some of us may feel—Butler himself would most likely have felt—that life without general

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

principles would not be worth having ; that to inquire into what constitutes the essential difference between right and wrong in conduct is anything but an idle task ; that an investigation of the kind, even if it does no more than to clear our minds and remove a false conceit of knowledge, is more profitable to us in the long run than could be any discovery of a code of duties ranged in order of importance. Still, whichever of the great ethical principles we accept : whether to seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number ; or the general good of the whole ; or the realisation of a divine idea ; or the perfection of self and the happiness of others ;—in each case, the influence of principle on practice is only indirect. In any instance of apparent conflict of duties, arguments for and against any particular course of action might be deduced from any of the principles suggested. The only principle that might seem free from this practical inadequacy is that of the supreme authority of the individual conscience. But those who rest on this as an ultimate ground make two immense assumptions : that the voice of conscience is always to be clearly distinguished from the promptings of affection, of habit, or of tradition ; and that conscience itself does not need training and cultivating. The ordinary “ plain man ” is often heard to say, “ I ought not to have done so, though I thought it right at the time.”

To make our minds a little clearer as to the nature of the conflict, let us look somewhat more closely into the conditions under which it appears. Writers on practical morals have divided our duties under three heads : those which we owe to God, to our neighbours, and to ourselves. True, they would not let us suppose that the three are antagonistic. Rather they might allow that

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

each kind of duty may be expressed in terms of the others. For the service of God is best accomplished by the service of man. Self is best served by following such lines of conduct as lead to religious confidence and to the good-will of our fellow-men. And social duties are best fulfilled if performed in a religious spirit, and also in a way consistent with dignity and self-respect. Yet in particular cases there has been, and still is, what looks like a serious conflict. Leaving aside the question whether duties to God ought to be regarded as a class by themselves, or as comprehending all duties viewed in a particular light, there is no doubt that religious duties commonly so-called have often been found incompatible with active social life, insomuch that many men and women have found it necessary to resign positions of authority and usefulness in the State or even in the Church, lest they should lose their capacity for spiritual contemplation. It is easy to say that the hermits of old did wrong to leave the world, and that nowadays people of strong religious feelings who are indifferent as to party politics and shrink from social gaieties leave important duties undone. But if they have found, in their personal experience, that the distractions of the world have made it impossible for them to live in accordance with the dictates of their religious convictions, we can only condemn them by condemning their religion too, and if that has borne worthy fruits, we dare not judge it so hastily. Then again, as to duties to one's self: if these are to be recognised at all, they must come under the heads of self-discipline and self-culture. Now without denying that, in the long run, the better and the more cultivated we become ourselves, the greater good shall we be able to accomplish for our neighbours, we must acknowledge that the course

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

of life prescribed for his own good by one who knows himself often varies from that forced upon him by the necessity of living in society. Some irritable persons require frequent periods of quiet and solitude in which to recover calm and equanimity. Those inclined to self-indulgence in small matters need the discipline of plain living. Those who are easily overcome by the spectacle of human vice and folly, and distracted by the pettiness of most of our interests in life, need to withdraw themselves as much as possible from sights and thoughts of commonplace existence, in order "im Ganzen, Guten, Schönen resolut zu leben." But quiet, plain living, and undisturbed thought are not always attainable in social life. There may be circumstances under which a man of refined tastes and of great literary talent finds that his duty to his country or to his family condemns him to live in a half-civilised colony, where his artistic and literary faculties perish for lack of nutriment and leisure. ( And even among the social duties themselves, there is conflict. The duties of public citizenship are not always compatible with those of private life. A vigorous, many-sided man may find time and energy for both. But sometimes circumstances render them incompatible. An Englishman in India cannot be a watchful father to his children at home. It is said of Wilberforce, the great champion against slavery, that when he was once entertaining a friend, the baby was brought in, and that the nurse, to apologise for the child's fretful reluctance to go to its father, said, "He always cries at strangers." ) This speech is said to have smitten Wilberforce to the heart, but I see no cause for his remorse. If his absorbing work left him no leisure for cultivating the society of his children, it would be very narrow and captious to say that he ought to have cared less about

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

his work, provided, of course, that his children were not actually neglected. Many wives with difficult or delicate husbands have to choose which should come first—their duties to husband or to children. I have heard it said that even the duties of motherhood alone cannot be impartially fulfilled in a large family. Women who devote most of their attention to growing-up boys and girls often have to leave the little ones chiefly to servants. Again, attention to small social amenities sometimes seems impossible to those whose brains are full of far-away schemes and ideas. Macaulay tells a story against his hero, William III., how, when a small dish of new peas was brought to table, he emptied it into his own plate, without regard to the wants of Princess Anne, who sat next him. If any man had, at a *table-d'hôte*, behaved similarly towards one of Macaulay's own sisters, one can imagine how he would have stigmatised him as a voracious, inconsiderate boor. But he pardons William III. because he *was* William III., and most of us would say quite rightly.

All this may seem to amount to little more than saying that most people are limited and one-sided both in their conception of duty and in their fulfilment of it. A few exceptional people, may be judged leniently for neglecting lesser duties in consideration of the excellence of their achievements in what is more important. Other people should, as a rule, try to avoid neglecting any duty which they acknowledge as such, though it is natural and right for them to lay more stress on some than on others. Again, people have no right to complain of a conflict of duties, when they have undertaken more than lies within their capacity. If, *e.g.*, a man or woman means to lead a life of self-devotion, whether as missionary, civil servant, or as pioneer of civilisation in

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

any form, in a climate that is morally or physically unhealthy for children, he must surrender the pleasures as well as the cares of married life. If a person of intellectual propensities has to give up all opportunities of self-culture in the ordinary sense of the word, at the call of social duty, he must trust to the loss being made up to him in some other way. And after all, the most important and undoubted duties of man cannot collide. Truthfulness, kindness, loyalty, courage : these are virtues which we are bound to practise under all circumstances. To dwell on the thought of possible conflicts is to encourage a spirit of casuistry and hesitation, which sound sense and fidelity to conscience will drive away as feathers before the wind.

Something is to be said for this view. Still, the result of our reflections seems to be that most of us habitually acknowledge the obligation lying upon us to do a good many things which we are quite incapable of doing, if we adequately discharge other obligations, which we regard as more seriously incumbent on us. This thought may make us more tolerant in judging the shortcomings of other people, and may sometimes lead us to attribute the conduct of our neighbours to their peculiar notion of the relative importance of various duties instead of stigmatising them as negligent of duty altogether. But for ourselves, the result is depressing. We feel as if we had always a difficult sum in proportion to work out, such that even if we did it to the best of our faculties, we should have to write *failed* against many of the tasks assigned to us in the world.

The only way to escape from these gloomy regions is to drop, for a time, the idea of duties and obligations as constituting the whole of morals, and to look at ourselves and our relations to the good and evil around us, with

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

all our hopes, fears, and strivings, from another point of view. The idea of duties to be fulfilled under a penalty—whether an arbitrary punishment or the bitter consciousness of failure—is an essentially legal conception. There is another conception of the moral life—that of a striving after an imperfectly conceived ideal. The two views are not incompatible; in a sense, the latter comprehends the former, while the former, the legal, in its higher regions has to cede to the latter. One may regard the two views as characteristic of the Roman and the Greek types of mind respectively. What the Roman achieved that was worthy to last he did by reason of his sense of duty and respect for authority. The greatest things accomplished by the Greeks were due to their love of the beautiful, with which they identified the good. From another point of view we may see in the distinction something like the difference between the Jewish and the Christian standpoints, the antithesis of Law and Gospel. For the early Jewish Law, though certainly it was always more than a set of mechanical formulæ, and showed itself capable, in time, of indefinite expansion, dealt mainly with precepts as to actions: “Thou shalt not,” or “Thou shalt,” “do this or that”; the Christian two commandments run, “Thou shalt love.” And these two commandments, whatever more they may imply, insist on an earnest search after the highest excellence, in whatever form it may be revealed to us, and a steady effort to realise that excellence in our own lives and—so far as may be—in that of the society to which we belong.

This view of the moral life, as an aspiration after the ideal, not merely an effort to fulfil duties, is not free from some of the difficulties on which we have been reflecting, but it presents them in another light. If we

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

have seen that duties conflict, we observe also that ideals are incompatible. To go back to some of the instances already considered: the ideal of the contemplative life is not the same as that of the active; the ideal pursued by the scholar, the statesman, the home-keeping parent, are not the same, and cannot all be attained together. True, some of the fundamental elements of morals enter into all ideals, so that fidelity to any one involves the keeping of the cardinal maxims of the law. But in the long run, the excellence or the worthlessness of any man's character depends on the faithfulness or the indifference with which he has pursued the ideal set before him. His non-achievement of excellences belonging to other ideals is not to be regarded as failure. That word is only applicable to the cases in which, through passion, slothfulness, or perversity, he has fallen below that which he had it in him to do or to become.

Thus whereas the idea of conflicting duties would suggest a harsh and perverse system of Divine government, under which all men must offend and incur the penalty appointed by an external authority, that of incompatible ideals only illustrates the incompleteness of human nature as we know it, and its incapacity of perfectly attaining its highest good. Of our ideals, as of our speculative systems, it may be said—

“ They are but broken lights of Thee,  
And Thou, O Lord, art more than they.”

One objection may be made to this view on Christian grounds. It may be said that whether or no pagan or worldly ideals are incompatible and merely subjective, all Christians have one ideal in which all excellences meet, and which is clearly portrayed for them in

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

historical narrative. To this I would reply, that however things may have been with the first Christians—though even they seem to have comprehended their Master in a fragmentary way—for men and women of later centuries and of western lands, the Christian ideal has not been one and fixed, and the art of imitating Christ has meant the endeavour after a perfect character, suggested rather than photographically delineated in ancient records, and ever needing fresh interpretation and adaptation to the soul of every new disciple. An interesting book\* has lately been written consisting of a selection of passages in which a multitude of writers have recorded their impressions of the character of Christ, and the variety of those impressions is very instructive. It is observed that in many cases the particular feature on which stress is laid is some virtue which the writer himself has failed to attain; in others, some point of excellence remarkable in his own character.

If we look again into the relations existing between ideals and duties, we see a close connection. Not only are the universal duties, as we have seen, implied in the pursuit of any great ideal whatsoever, but under some circumstances fidelity to the ideal creates duties which would not be regarded as such, according to any ordinary system of rights and obligations. For if it has once forcibly occurred to a man or woman that this or that action is possible for him, is part of the good life marked out for him, then his conscience cries woe to him if he does it not, and he feels himself to have been faithless, even if his neighbours could not reasonably find fault with him. Nobody could venture to say that it is any particular man's duty, however able he may be, to

\* C. Marson on "The Following of Christ."

## THE CONFLICT OF DUTIES

achieve a monumental literary work. Yet after Gibbon, sitting in the ruins of the Capitol, had conceived the idea of writing the "Decline and Fall," he would have fallen below his own dignity had he shrunk from the vast labour of the task. No one would have blamed Grace Darling for staying on her island amid the howling storms. Yet after she had once determined to go out with the lifeboat, she probably felt it her simple duty to persevere. )

We thus see not only how dangerous it is to pass sweeping moral judgments on one another, but also how easily possible it is for moral heroes, without mock-modesty as to themselves, and without setting up an unduly high standard for others, to decline the eulogies passed on their noblest actions, and to say that they have only done their duty.

I should like to apply these considerations to a doctrine commonly regarded as theological, but having an important practical and ethical bearing—what is sometimes called perfectionism. I have not studied this subject in relation to theological systems, but the practical controversy seems to me to be of this kind: whereas divines who dwell much on the fallen estate of human nature and the universal tendency to darkness and depravity are always insisting that it is impossible for any human being, even by using to the utmost all God-given helps, to rise entirely out of sin and corruption into perfect holiness, other and more inspiring teachers have been unwearied in pointing to the heights which every soul may reach, the spiritual capacities which it may come to exercise, if it steadfastly follows the light given to it. This confidence is the very life-blood of the teaching of the Quakers, the early Wesleyans, and the Salvation Army. Those opposed

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to it think that it arouses spiritual pride. Those who proclaim it accuse their antagonists, as George Fox did, of "pleading for sin." Now if, after our thoughts on duties and ideals, we ask the question whether moral perfection is attainable by man, we obtain a twofold answer. No man with a high moral standard can ever fulfil all the duties which he recognises, because some of them conflict with others. By a process of co-ordination, he may select those which he feels most bound to fulfil, and those which he leaves he may consider as lying outside the range of duty altogether. Yet he seems to himself and others in a sense bound to attempt them also, and thus he remains imperfect. Or we may say that he is imperfect because in striving to realise the ideal set before him, he has to neglect the pursuit of much that is good but that is incompatible with the attainment of that ideal. But in this case the imperfection is a want of completeness, not an ingrained fault. No man in himself may attain entire and complete perfection, but if he strives constantly after the best that is possible for him, and at the same time contemplates with loving reverence the good that is realised in others, though not in himself, he may attain to an excellence which is higher than any more contracted faultlessness.

If some of these remarks seem vague without a preliminary inquiry whence we obtain our ideals and why they claim our allegiance, I would relegate such inquiries to Butler's "men of leisure," the speculative thinkers. In the region of practical morals and religion they may be taken among the necessary data, as we take the dictates of conscience.

It may be, however, as well here to suggest one or two practical applications of our principle. One is,

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that we should avoid the prevalent morbid horror of being one-sided. If all our sides stood equally well to the world, they would not equally well fit into the building of which each forms a part. Again, we see the crippling effects of that scrupulosity, by which "conscience doth make cowards of us all." Further, in following what seems to us the best, we must not be too much afraid of causing some pain to others by the way. To take an illustration: I feel sure that a good many people, especially young people, stunt their spiritual growth by attending such religious services as are approved by parents and teachers, and by desiring no other, even if the accustomed services have become to them unedifying and a mere trial to flesh and spirit. "Natural piety" is a necessary element in any lofty ideal. But even it may lay too heavy a burden on the aspiring soul. And very often the independent course that the natural impulses of faith and devotion would prompt may ultimately prove itself more satisfactory to those whose displeasure is feared than a heartless conformity, the nullity of which no well-meant dissimulation can permanently disguise.

There is an easy-going optimism which tries to smooth down the difficulties which beset our paths both in living and in thinking, by imagining some scheme of compensation, supposed even in this life to redress all grievances. If a man loses money by honesty, he is likely to recover it by his credit. If a mother lives the life of a drudge, she has the affection of her children to console her in her old age. Or if material and social advantages do not always attend the right course of action, at least a moral advantage must follow, in the strengthening and purifying of character. The outworks of this naturalistic optimism have long been stormed,

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and I am inclined to think that its inner stronghold cannot stand. It seems a hard saying, but I think it is possible that we may lose some high moral faculties and spiritual perceptions by the exclusive regard which we sometimes have to give to the tasks we feel bound to take up. It is vain to hope that human faculties will ever discern the final solution of the problem. But this thought may humble without unduly depressing us. Our thirst for personal happiness can never be satisfied till we cease to attend to it. The nobler thirst for personal perfection may perhaps be likewise incapable of any satisfaction that we can conceive, until we can say, with Galahad, "When I lose myself I find myself." For such perfection cannot come to man till he has learned to merge all particular and personal longings and aspirations in the one desire after the Eternal Good, not that it may be enjoyed by the longing soul but that it may prevail everywhere: as Clough says—

"It fortifies my soul to know  
That, if I perish, truth is so,  
That howsoe'er I stray and range,  
Whate'er I do, thou dost not change.  
I steadier step when I recall  
That, if I slip, thou dost not fall."



## II

### ***THE RELIGIOUS NEEDS OF THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE***



## II

### THE RELIGIOUS NEEDS OF THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE

I FEEL considerable diffidence in attempting to deal with the subject chosen as title for this paper. I would earnestly disclaim any pretensions to speak with authority on the aspirations, toils, and conflicts of those who are privileged to hand on the torch of knowledge from age to age. However, by the intellectual life I understand—not that of the greatest intellects, but that of all whose interests and pursuits are chiefly of an intellectual kind, and under this description would come all teachers and students who take their profession seriously. And in pointing out needs, one does not profess a clear understanding how these needs are all to be met. We may have some first-hand knowledge of these matters without having encountered and overcome the temptations of great souls, the terrible foes that reserve their shafts for men who stand head and shoulders above their fellows.

In speaking of the religious needs of the intellectual life, we need not assume that the needs of such a life are *greater* than those of any other. If in any way they are different, they are worth inquiring into by themselves. Of course *all* natures, intellectual and unintel-

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lectual, strong and weak, remarkable and commonplace, have their religious needs, and perhaps if we could see things in their right proportions we should not see so very much difference, at bottom, between one person and another in this respect. Of all alike the words of Augustine may be said: "Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart resteth not until it repose in Thee." With all, except, perhaps, a few naturally pious souls, there is a difficulty in passing through things temporal so as not to lose the things eternal; with all, the thought of God, and all that is bound up with that thought in men and women who know of the life and teaching of Christ, has to be recurred to and consciously dwelt upon, lest the business and pleasures of the world should banish it from the permanent consciousness. In all, the will needs to be taught to recognise the law of righteousness and the affections to desire nothing short of perfection. Thus, much of the hortatory teaching given by men of deep and wide spiritual experience is acceptable to very diverse types of mind, and as we sit at the feet of those who excel most in purity and insight, we hardly think of classing them according to mental proclivities or endowments. But among ordinary people, at ordinary times, the difficulties of keeping to a high religious standard vary much according to circumstances, ability, and customary tastes and habits.

Thus the intellectual life has difficulties of its own. I am not sure, however, that they are always clearly seen and described by those who follow other lines. For example, I am not sure that "pride of intellect," a very real danger, no doubt, in certain societies at certain times, is half so prevalent among intellectual people as the pride born of presumptuous ignorance is among the uncultured. When I hear of the opposition between

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faith and reason, I often feel inclined to protest that faith would have much more power among us if we were a little more reasonable. Again, if the absorbing nature of our pursuits tends to crowd out of our time and minds the exercises and the thoughts for which other people have more leisure, this is the result not of a studious, but of a busy life, and must be at least as besetting a danger to those engaged in business or in the social engagements of the fashionable world as it is to students such as ourselves. I would also demur to the opinion that a life of study must tend to isolation and self-absorption. Such may be the case with solitary scholars and recluses, but our college life is by no means wanting in scope for the exercise of social duties and mutual forbearance and kindness. But if our life here is in many ways conducive to moral and religious improvement; if it begets in us a wholesome sense of our ignorance; if it gives us worthy objects of thought which exclude petty cares and jealousies; if, however busy, it leaves time—for all who feel the necessity—for some quiet and solitary meditation; if it draws us in many ways together, and makes us able to care for and to work with people who differ widely from ourselves and from one another—if it puts all these helps in our way, it may still have its own dangers, and these dangers are all the more to be avoided in that they hinder us from making the most of such helps, and of rising to a higher level than that of our friends who have to go without them.

Confining myself chiefly to the kind of intellectual life with which we, in this place, are most conversant, I thought I might divide under three heads those conditions which involve special needs and consequently demand special efforts.

In the first place, students here have much more

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scope than is commonly given in family life for choice in observance or non-observance of religious practices. Most women living at home go to church, regularly or irregularly, according to family rule and habit, though of course at the present day it is not unusual to find members of one family attending several different churches and some holding aloof from religious services altogether. But at home, habit, consideration for the feelings of others, and a certain inclination which is due chiefly to habit and combined with a vague sense of duty, go much further in determining the line taken in these matters than do personal preference or conviction. It is necessary and quite desirable that, some time or other, people should decide their habitual action on more reasonable and conscientious grounds. The danger which comes in here is lest our action should not be determined on such grounds, but dictated by indolence, fancy, or the practice of some who may be able to thrive on a spiritual diet which would not satisfy others. This is especially the case with those who have never been taught to own any duty in observing rules or hearing instruction, apart from their own feeling as to what is personally and directly beneficial. It would of course be absurd as well as uncharitable to say that those who seldom or never attend religious services are necessarily irreligious people, or that they do not worship God after some fashion, perhaps a higher fashion than ours. Yet any tendency to weaken the habit of worshipping regularly, in the company of others, must be fraught with danger to those whose spiritual nature requires some such stimulant. And even when it leaves the personal religious conscience no weaker, it must snap the bond which unites those who worship together and helps them to realise their participation in a

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common life. This danger belongs to all changes in life which separate men and women from their early and natural surroundings, and cause them to look upon themselves, and to be looked upon by others, as individuals rather than as members of a family or of a small society.

Akin to it, but more often found at the entrance to our intellectual life, is the change necessitated in our judgment of persons and our feelings towards them, whether they be friends and teachers known in real life, or writers who influence us by their books. Contact with persons who have thought more than we have, or whose thoughts are different from ours—deference and admiration commanded by those whose views and habits we have hitherto regarded with indifference or possibly with suspicion, leads to a widening of the intellectual horizon, to an appreciation of many-sided excellence, to a reverence for what is best, apart from mere adventitious circumstances; and these are perhaps the greatest gain in University life. Yet with this very gain there comes in a certain source of danger. It is impossible all in a moment to readjust our notions as to what constitutes excellence and worthlessness in human character. Our old standard may have been partly based on prejudice, but we need *some* standard by which to judge our own conduct, though we may often do well to suspend judgment in the case of others. Perhaps, too, there is more rational ground for the traditional rules by which we commonly proceed than we are at first inclined to allow. Perhaps we do not entirely comprehend how it is that the great characters we have learned to admire have come to transcend the rules to which we have ourselves conformed. Perhaps, as hinted just now, by imitating them without such comprehension, we may

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find that we are losing the nutriment which was quite necessary for us, without having acquired the power of assimilating the food, of whatever kind it may be, on which their greater and larger life depends.

But there is a third danger, and that, I think, the one commonly regarded as the most serious attending the intellectual life—the danger of succumbing to the difficulties which every mind must feel in receiving freely all the truths, or even, on probation, all fruitful ideas and luminous hypotheses that may be presented to it, without distraction, without futile efforts to resist the *bouleversement* of thought that is often bound to come, without abandoning our old system as soon as it begins to shake, or trying to patch it up after it has hopelessly fallen. I do not wish to enlarge on the old theme of freedom of thought. Most people would acknowledge such freedom to be a good thing in itself, but capable of abuse. The *name* is certainly as often and as grossly abused as ever was that of political liberty. The *thing* itself—liberty to think without restraint about everything which lies within the compass of thought—is sometimes confused with a belief in the power of thought—of observation, generalisation, and deduction—to solve all mysteries. But all great thinkers warn us as to the limitations of positive and established knowledge. They do not thereby prove the existence of the supernatural, but they show that it can never be disproved, while the dictum of Bacon may still be held to stand: “A little philosophy inclineth man’s mind to Atheism, but depth in philosophy bringeth men’s minds about to religion.”

Of course some people think that there are many spheres into which the reason ought not to be allowed to intrude. It seems to me, however, that it is unwise and hardly honest to put up artificial restrictions. Very

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few questions, even those in which a religious element is predominant, have not a side presented to our faculties of judgment and reasoning, and we can best realise our limitations by trying to transcend them and then acquiescing in the futility of the attempt. All who have any acquaintance with philosophic principles know that we all believe, and must believe, a great deal more than we can prove, and though this statement should never be accepted as an excuse for narrow credulity, it militates against a shallow incredulity.

But in order not to seem too vague and general, let us glance for a moment at the chief sources whence the ideas come that are impossible to fit into the popular, unreasoned notions on religion and theology, which are commonly found among unintellectual Christians at the present day. (a) Some of them came first from the physical sciences, and forced all thinking people either to deny the results of scientific investigation, or to give up a primitive cosmogony founded on Biblical records. In these regions the conflict is happily over. No thinking people believe in a six-days creation, and a recent attempt to convict a worthy bishop of heresy because he believed in evolution, moved only scorn, or even amusement, in orthodox and heterodox alike. (b) The new ideas which came from history, and from the wider application of historical methods of criticism, have not yet assumed so undoubted a position in relation to the beliefs of thoughtful Christians, partly, perhaps, because they are newer, partly because there is, after all, some moral and religious reason why historical statements are accepted and rejected, such as does not exist in the case of statements about natural phenomena. Probably in course of time the field left by theologians to the historical investigator will be larger than at present,

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but in the *interpretation*, both of history and of natural science, religion will always be operative.\*

(c) But the third source of the new, at first revolutionary, conceptions, is the first in importance: Philosophy. I am not, of course, referring only to the discoveries of special students of the mental and moral sciences. There are many philosophic notions which somehow filter through books and conversations into the minds of people who are cultivated, if not philosophic. Such persons, at the beginning of their intellectual life, realise how crude and inadequate are most of the conceptions of popular theology. All their notions as to conscience, spirit, immortality become different, and often the phrases in which they have expressed their religious tenets become quite unmeaning. Possibly, too, their more cultured taste may be repelled by the inartistic form of the ritual and other accessories of worship which were once taken for granted. Above all, they see how all their thoughts of God are anthropomorphic and inconsistent. It may be that such thoughts, as they fade into nothingness, take with them all possibility of thinking about God at all, and then comes the bitter cry of one of the greatest scientific men of our day: "The Great Companion is gone!" Even if the result is not so desperate as this, a difficulty is felt in deciding which of the old and strengthening beliefs one can honestly retain when one has passed into a new mental atmosphere.

Now, as we have already hinted, if all the dangers pointed out are effectually overcome, the result is a nobler type of religious life than was possible while the intellectual faculties lay dormant. The mind that discerns God in nature is moved to adoration by every great natural discovery. The student of history ought

\* See "Essay on Christianity as an Historical Religion."

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to have a far grander conception of the working of the Divine Power through all the ages than is possible to those who view each event as isolated and in a sense accidental; or those to whom the whole world of men seems but a gigantic mechanism. The religious philosopher stand on firmer and on higher ground than the mere traditional theologian. But unfortunately there are many more people able to take in the ideas which necessitate a revision of old beliefs than there are capable of forming a new and better synthesis. Meantime, a compromise has to be made between the necessity of thought and the necessity of worship, and no doubt it must often happen for a time that the highest religious faculties suffer for want of the kind of exercises to which they were accustomed, but which, as they now seem to belong to a more primitive state of consciousness, have ceased to be in any way helpful.

Now it may safely be said that no greater calamity can befall any human soul than to lose the inspiring and warning thought of the presence of God and to cease endeavouring to hold communion with God. Belief in the possibility of such communion, and the adoption of some means of realising it, is the distinctive mark of the genuinely religious spirit. Anthropological investigation seems to show that it was prominent in the earliest of natural religions. The desire for it is expressed by all earnest seekers, the greatness and joy of it by all who have found it. "Nevertheless, I am always by thee," says the Psalmist, "Thou hast holden me by my right hand." "Think of God more often than you breathe," wrote the pagan Epictetus. "If you always remember that whatever you are doing in the soul or in the body, God stands by . . . you will have God dwelling with you." And to One who knew more

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of what that communion meant than either poet or philosopher the words are assigned, "I am not alone, for the Father is with Me."

The keeping alive of this sense is the one great requisite for the religious life. But owing to the vast differences among individual human souls we cannot all follow one and the same method towards that end. As just pointed out, some things may become unmeaning to us when we reach a certain stage of mental development. At such times our duty plainly is to go forward and not back—not to persuade ourselves by bad arguments that the old, uncritical position was the right one after all, nor yet to be too scrupulous in making use of rites and formulæ which have a real meaning for us even if they may mean something different to some other people. Compromise is not dishonest, but is a necessity in many spheres of life. "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." There is equal danger in a cowardly shrinking from the necessary and logical consequences of our education and in the disuse, whether through impatience or through a morbid conscience, of all means by which we can combine with others in work and worship.

Among the different means of strengthening the religious life against adverse forces is the formation of societies, with rules of life and provision for intercourse and instruction. Of course there have been lay brotherhoods and sisterhoods attached to many of the great orders of the Roman Church, and they seem suitable in any church which, comprising many good and many evil members, does not in itself furnish all the aid and stimulus that is desired by ardent souls. They seem specially suitable in the English Church, where, for many centuries, there has been no effective spiritual discipline for the laity. A rule is often helpful to many,

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though irksome to some, and the consciousness of being a co-worker with many others, who share in one's own needs and aspirations, must be encouraging and stimulating.

Yet all societies, all the observances which those societies maintain, are but means to an end. It is well to realise what that end is, and the grave responsibility which rests on those who have chosen the intellectual life. That life, uplifted by religious enthusiasm, may indeed become the "city set on a hill," while, if it sinks to a low mechanical level, it falls lower than any which owns no such lofty ideals. For if a spirit of consecration may ennoble the meanest work, the want of such a spirit may debase the most excellent work we can perform. If undertaken and prosecuted in a sordid, worldly fashion, the search for truth and the training of the mind by instruction in truth become little better than sacrilege. Only when the intellectual life realises its spiritual possibilities can the intellect itself become free from grovelling tendencies and serve as a guiding light towards ultimate knowledge and safety.



### **III**

## ***THE MORAL IDEAL OF THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE***



### III

#### THE MORAL IDEAL OF THE INTELLECTUAL LIFE

**A**T one of the recent meetings of this Society I had the privilege of bringing before it some considerations on the Religious Needs of the Intellectual Life. When we looked carefully into this subject its importance seemed to us by no means due to any unwholesome atmosphere which might seem to pervade the intellectual life, nor to any intensity in the dangers which beset it as compared with those attending other courses of life, but rather to the fact that this course, if the most is made of it, may lead to such lofty points of moral and spiritual excellence that any partial shortcoming must call for deep regret, any entire failure must be followed by the very bitterest remorse. I desire to ask your attention now for a short time to the character we should expect to find—and, we may thankfully say, we often do find—in those whose pursuits are chiefly or entirely of an intellectual kind.

I will keep to our rough definition of the intellectual life as one occupied in learning and teaching. These two occupations commonly go hand in hand, as no one can ever teach to any purpose who does not retain the mind and habits of a learner, and few who are or have

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been learners live all their lives in such entire isolation that they never, in their turn, become in a sense teachers, if not to regular pupils, yet to fellow-learners, children, or friends. At the same time it is evident that this life admits of endless degrees, from the deepest-thinking philosopher to the board-school pupil-teacher. For some a purely or chiefly intellectual life is only temporary, a phase through which they pass before they become subject to the pressure of the outside world. But even for such, a glimpse of the ideal we are seeking may prove a stimulus and an inspiration in their later life, and for all, in so far as *some* intellectual life may fall to their share, it is possible to admire and to aim at what is sometimes denominated intellectual virtue.

But is there such a thing, it may be asked, as intellectual virtue? Are not the springs of moral action to be found rather in the affections and the will than in the mind? Are not intellectual people bound to conform to the same moral code as those who have no intellectual aims at all, and is not moral excellence often found quite apart from mental force and capacity?

If we were to reply to these questions that those engaged in intellectual pursuits stand on a higher level than their fellows, are above the ordinary rules of conduct, and can alone attain to the noblest life, we should, of course, be guilty of a presumption too absurd, almost, to arouse indignation, although we should only be re-asserting the doctrine of certain sects in the early Church and of some other moralists of various periods and peoples. It is in the middle and upper region of morals, so to speak, that the different types of excellence proper to different modes of life become evident. In a civilised society there are certain bounds which every moral person regards as limits which he cannot transgress,

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while there are also some points of perfection only attained by a few heroes and saints. But in most people who aim at something better than mere respectability we find that certain virtues are more conspicuous, certain vices less apparent, according to the kind of temptation or absence of temptation afforded by one or another mode of life, and the attitude towards the world and all within it and beyond it commonly taken up by those who follow one particular profession or mode of living. Thus, to begin low down in the scale, there is said to be a certain code of honour among thieves, which keeps them in some few respects on a higher level than that of criminals too low to realise any solidarity among themselves. And we may safely say that this class of the community is exempt from one temptation to which many of us are liable—that of keeping up an appearance of outward respectability and of disguising themselves even before their own eyes. But, to avoid paradox, let us turn to another class of men whose moral character bears strongly the impress of their profession and occupation—those who lead a military life. Of course every one knows that there are some failings and even vices to which military men are peculiarly liable. On the other hand, the character of a soldier seen at its best—as we see it sometimes in fiction (*e.g.*, Colonel Newcome) or in the biographies of some of the greatest generals—is very winning and admirable. The points of excellence are partly due to the absence of temptations to some kinds of faults—selfishness in small things, worship of rank and wealth, petty conventionality—partly to the moral force which comes from other temptations overcome; partly to the absolute necessity of some noble qualities—respect for law and order, indifference to danger and to the prospect of death,

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readiness to rise at the call of duty, which are admirable everywhere, but indispensable to the soldier. It is, of course, true that all virtues ought to be desired and inculcated everywhere. Yet the habits of our life may make some good qualities a part of our character without any effort on our part. Thus it is, to use a homely phrase, "no credit" to *us* if we do not cheat, lie, and murder. And the same habits of life make us more sensitive to some moral distinctions sometimes lost in obscurity, and may make it shameful in us not to do or to forbear doing things which in other walks of life might be done or left undone without invoking any particular guilt on the part of the agent.

To come, then, to the intellectual life, let us inquire into the qualities found in those who pursue it to any purpose and the type of character found in those who yield to the best influences of such a life and have overcome the temptations which accompany them. The task is not likely to tend to self-conceit. If we realise that our ideal is a very high one our practical shortcomings will strike us the more forcibly.

1. Now the first qualification for the intellectual life, one which involves all the other admirable characteristics of that life taken at its best, is a pure and whole-hearted love of truth. This love of truth may be regarded in two aspects—as an eager desire at all costs to acquire knowledge and as an habitual effort to convey the right impressions of things to other people, to be accurate in stating facts and as clear as possible in setting forth ideas. In each of these aspects love of truth may suffer caricature, so as to assume the form in the one case of restless curiosity, in the other of pedantry. But in neither case does the defect arise from too exclusive a regard to truth—the fault lies rather in a narrow and

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superficial view of truth and of our duty with regard to it. And both these exaggerations have some nobleness in them and may, in certain phases of life, when the relative proportion of things is distorted, serve a most useful end in the development of culture. We owe much to pedants. Browning's "Grammarians" was a fine specimen of the class. He is not a caricature: I have read of two scholars of the seventh century who spent fourteen days and fourteen nights in a discussion as to whether the pronoun *ego* had or had not a vocative, and finally referred the difficult question to one skilled in the science of grammar. If, in the Middle Ages, some men had not had an exaggerated regard for the niceties of classical etymology, how could modern critical scholarship ever have arisen? And if some people had not been very inquisitive into everything within their possible ken, whence would logic have obtained the material on which to try her nascent powers? The relation of curiosity to love of knowledge generally is one easy to discover, but not very easy to define and expound. It may be worth while to look into it a little before going further.

When we speak of pure love of knowledge we distinguish it in the first place from the desire to acquire knowledge as means to an end—whether such end be mean and paltry, as personal emolument and the flattery of our self-importance, or natural and laudable, as success in a profession and the power to impart physical or mental assistance to our neighbours. In passing I would note one distinction to be made between the higher and the lower aims set before the *interested* seeker for knowledge, viz., that the higher may often be concomitant with a genuine love of truth for its own sake, whereas the subordination of knowledge to personal

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advantage must degrade the idea of truth and the character of the intellect and all its work. But there is a kind of disinterested curiosity which seems like an incipient love of truth, differing only from it in its partial and limited character. Take, for example, the not unkindly interest in our neighbours which makes us anxious to know all we can about them. The acquisition of such knowledge often stimulates to considerable intellectual exertion and affords a kind of playground for the exercise of the reasoning faculties. All who have read "A Window in Thrums" will remember the delightful chapter "On the track of the minister," in which we have to follow the subtle reasoning by which two peasant women determine accurately where the minister has gone for the Sunday, who is coming to supply his pulpit, and in which houses in the town the supply minister is to sleep and to take each of his meals. One can illustrate from this chapter all the logical processes by which the sciences have been built up and are still being increased and co-ordinated. We feel that Jess and Leeby belonged to the race which produced Adam Smith and David Hume. But there is a difference between the kind of knowledge which they look for and find and that which is the goal of the typical truth-seeker. Their aim is to arrive at a particular fact or group of facts. The possession of these facts does not render any more sure the body of fact they already have, nor does it in any way modify their mental attitude to their whole environment. But the pure desire for truth, though involving, by the way, the desire to know the truth about this and that, aims at the particular only as a means to reaching the more general. The real enthusiast for knowledge has a contempt for isolated disconnected facts until he has brought them into con-

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nection with the principles which form the whole groundwork of his mental life. Not, of course, that we can afford to despise *all* mental efforts or acquisitions which fall short of the construction of a system of thought into which each new observation or generalisation may be fitted. But we are quite safe in saying that a genuine desire for knowledge, in an intellectual sense, appreciates any truth according to the power it gives us of discerning more clearly the relations which shall prevail among our mental conceptions and ideas. Newton's apple in the old story may be interesting from more than one point of view, but to the philosopher it was interesting as an example of universally prevalent law.

It may seem that we are making the pursuit of knowledge into a striving after abstractions to the exclusion of all that is beautiful or worthy of admiration. Perhaps, however, if we were to inquire a little more into the nature of the beautiful and the otherwise admirable, we should see that the more extended the intellectual horizon, and the more harmonious the arrangement of ideas, the more manifold are our opportunities of recognising beauty and merit of the highest order. But without entering on so wide a field, we may say that even if the subordination of knowledge to a direct practical end of a particular kind may, in the abstract, seem inconsistent with that entire devotion to truth which is essential to the intellectual life, yet the search for principles by which the practical conduct of life should be guided is an object quite consistent with the very purest intention on the part of the inquirer. In fact, the formation of a practical philosophy may be said to include that of a system of knowledge and belief, since thinking is, after all, an active process, and has been recognised as such by many profound philosophers. Those who set

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before them the task of Descartes, "to discriminate the false from the true, so as to see clearly in action and to walk sure-footedly in this life," are surely as earnest, as thorough, and as devoted seekers after truth as those whose intellectual motives are entirely scientific or abstract.

If we have ever grasped the idea of love of truth as the chief motive of the intellectual life, we see how the moral standard of that life imperatively demands the assiduous practise of some virtues on which less stress is laid in some other fields of human activity; and also how certain qualities found in all good men derive a peculiar character from their conjunction with habits and dispositions engendered by intellectual pursuits.

2. One of these is Intellectual Justice. Its range is somewhat beyond that of ordinary justice because it acknowledges rights and obligations of an intangible kind, such as the world in general is apt to ignore. It seeks to estimate what is due not only to the present reputation of the living but to the memory of the dead. In the moral code of the intellectual life there is no distinction in guilt between libelling a present-day statesman or author, and misjudging, through idleness, party-prejudice, or malignity, such men as Bacon, Laud, Fox,—nay, such far-away persons as Aspasia, Cleon, Tiberius. We may not all feel it our duty to make up our minds as to the real character of historical personages who have for ages been an enigma, but we *do* feel it our duty to refrain from sounding forth emphatically judgments which, so far as we are concerned, are utterly baseless; and if we have to study the lives of any of these persons, we are bound to use the best of our abilities to obtain all the light thrown on them from various quarters. While the Roman

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Church has always maintained, in some fashion or another, that the dead still form members of one community with the living to such an extent that the living still owe certain duties to them as much as to their contemporaries, the idea is very weak among Protestants until it is quickened by the intellectual sense which knows nothing of time in its discernment of persons. When once realised, the principle commends itself strongly to our moral nature that those to whom we should do what we would have them do to us are not only those who are just at this moment our fellow-denizens on this earth. Fairness, gratitude, reverence, are owed by all of us to all members of the human family, whether departed or still here.

Intellectual justice and fairness involve another duty : that of scrupulously avoiding the presumption of asserting as our own suggestions or ideas which we have derived from either books or conversation. Plagiarism is recognised as a heinous offence among all literary people. But there is a certain looseness in the citation of other people's opinions and the appropriation of other people's thoughts which may be a venial fault in the world generally, but is not to be tolerated in the intellectual life. To verify references, to avoid exaggerations even when they would add piquancy to speech or writings ; to criticise without being captious and to appreciate without becoming blind to defects : these may be regarded as laudable habits or counsels of perfection to some people. In the intellectual life they become a simple matter of right or wrong, for the reason that all who follow that life are morally bound, in great things as in small, to eschew any practices which interfere with its full development. A high standard of truthfulness is as necessary to a scholar as a bold heart is to a soldier.

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3. Another element in the ideal we are examining is intellectual humility. This is a trait which always distinguishes the deepest scholars and the most inspiring teachers. It comes generally from the realisation of the slightness of our knowledge compared to all that there is to be known, and the weakness of our faculties which would fain reach that which lies beyond their ken. A well-known instance of it is seen in Sir Isaac Newton's comparison of his discoveries to a handful of pebbles picked up by a child on the limitless beach. A beautiful example is seen in the life of a great Cambridge scholar lately departed, Dr. Hort. Even the breadth of his learning seems to have impressed his friends less than his frank confession of ignorance and wonder when some novel question was put to him. The connection of vanity with learning is not quite imaginary, but is not to be found, I think, in the higher grades of the intellectual life. With the doubtful exception of Cicero,\* I do not know of any teachers or writers that have had a strong posthumous influence in whose character self-conceit was a conspicuous feature. Among the half-educated, especially if they come from a class that has till lately not been educated at all, a small amount of superficial knowledge is of the nature to justify the saying that "knowledge puffeth up." But the fault is in the smallness and superficiality, not in the knowledge itself, and the remedy is to be found in a raising, not in a lowering, of our educational standard :—

"Let knowledge grow from more to more,  
But more of reverence in us dwell."

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\* Voltaire has been suggested to me as another exception. But perhaps his influence was due to the fact that he embodied the ideals of his age; that of Cicero to his perfection of style. Neither was great as a character.

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4. Then we may see in all intellectual heroes and in many who, without being heroes, or highly intellectual persons, are possessed with that love of truth from which, as we have said, the intellectual virtues chiefly spring, a peculiarly noble form of self-devotion. Of course we all recognise that excellence of all kinds needs some self-sacrifice, but perhaps too little stress is laid on this truth by those who to entice people to intellectual pursuits would represent the intellectual life as a bed of roses. Of course many pleasures of the ordinary kind, physical and social, are ordinarily compatible with the career of a student or a teacher, but unless these pleasures are made strictly subordinate to the main object of life, they are apt to prevent that object from ever being achieved. The facilities for learning have so multiplied in our days, that we scarcely recognise as we should the long and earnest labours of those by whom the body of human knowledge has been painfully built up—labours into which we must partially enter if we would enter into the spirit of our predecessors, as we travel along the way, which, in spite of all our steam-rollers and levellers, must in some parts ever remain steep and stony.

5. Intellectual patience implies the power of waiting long for the solution of questions which have been set before us;—the scorn of a hasty adoption of half-explanations or of a lazy acquiescence in ignorance wherever knowledge is possible. It also involves a willingness to wait long for the recognition by the world of one's own discoveries or other achievements. No wonder! For at how low a value must any one count the world and its opinion who has once realised in all their keenness the pains of ignorance and the joy of discovery!

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6. We might go on to contemplate the dignity and force of that complete intellectual liberty which comes from a courageous persistency in following up all suggestions which may lead to higher knowledge, even if they be to our own discomfort or pain ; the placid courage of Socrates and of those who fell under his influence and learned from him the duty of following an argument steadily and honestly, even to the destruction, it might be, of their dearest hopes. Of course those who always keep their minds open to receive new thoughts and new aspects of truth may sometimes, if they are not strong, be easily carried away by fanciful and specious theories, but this danger is slight in the case of all who keep a sense of the relative proportion of things, who have strong principles which they have put to the test and to which they keep as to a sheet-anchor,—who are able to suspend judgment on new theories not yet sufficiently established to be safely accepted. The man in whose judgment we feel confidence is neither he that voluntarily excludes all novelty from his thoughts, nor he that is “carried about with every wind of doctrine,” but rather he that pursues a steady course of progress, wasting no energy in running after ephemeral theories nor yet in defending old systems which new knowledge has shown to be inadequate.

I should weary you if I were to dwell longer on the tone and complexion taken by the several virtues and worthy moral qualities when they are found in whole-hearted lovers of learning. Those who have followed me thus far can carry on the same train of thought and fill in our rough sketch of the moral character of a good intellectual person.

But there are two kinds of criticism to which we may here be exposed. I imagine that some people will say,

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“ This looks very well on paper ; but in point of fact intellectual men have the faults of other people and some peculiar to themselves. What is more detestable than the jealous rivalry and irascibility of many eminent scholars ? Human interests tend to be weaker in this than in other kinds of life, and some of its virtues have a non-natural, exotic character.” And others may say, “ Granted that this is a noble ideal, is it not an exclusively pagan one ? Is it not different in kind from that of the Christian saint, and is not any attempt to recover it reactionary and impossible ? ”

To take the former objection first : of course intellectual men are not above the weaknesses of ordinary mortals. Their freedom from some kinds of temptations to evil is accompanied by a liability to other kinds. The acknowledgment of a higher standard, in some respects, than that of the world at large must involve a tendency to moral deterioration whenever conduct falls short of principle. It is a familiar paradox that moral progress can only be made by growth in moral sensitiveness, and that moral sensitiveness, or delicacy of conscience, must multiply sins. The more highly developed any organism the more its chances of falling into disorder. Yet that which is higher, though faulty, is surely to be preferred to a “ narrower perfectness.” As to the bickerings of learned men, they are only more hateful than tavern broils on the principle of *corruptio optimi pessima*. And the world is but too apt to judge of the character and morals of any particular class of people by those who are the least fit to represent it.

But the second criticism : that which would deny the compatibility of the intellectual with the Christian ideal, is more serious, and requires a little more consideration.

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The Christian ideal is not one belonging exclusively to any class or section. Nor does it belong to one period or race, but is found and can easily be recognised in many places, and has, while remaining fundamentally the same, undergone many changes, to be adapted to the life of man from age to age. Inwardness and purity, the recognition of God in all that seems excellent in nature and in man, the belief in a closer relation between God and man than was possible under any pre-Christian teaching—the joyful consciousness of co-operation with the Divine Power in every good work—if these are the most essential traits of the Christian character, they are to be found wherever the doctrine of Christ has been absorbed, even if conjoined with a faulty conscience and with hardly-quelled or misdirected passions. The type of the Christian soldier and that of the Christian monk of the Middle Ages are different in many ways, yet perhaps the resemblances between them as compared with types from the non-Christian world, are more conspicuous than the differences. Not that Christianity is a foreign element super-added to the moral ideal of the ascetic or of the military life, or even of the intellectual life which we are now considering; but rather that these various types of moral excellence acquire greater force and sweetness from being cultivated in a Christian atmosphere.

Yet the difficulty remains, that at times there has been bitter hostility between those who followed the intellectual life and those who preached the Christian religion. Also that many of the intellectual virtues on which we have been dwelling have received scant scope for exercise within the pale of the chief branches of the Christian Church. Gregory, the greatest constructive genius among the statesmen-ecclesiastics of the early

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Middle Ages, reproved most bitterly a fellow-bishop for applying himself to the "idle vanities of secular learning." Those among the early Fathers of the Church who still studied the great works of the past show, as a rule, very little gratitude or veneration towards the masters with whom, in spite of themselves, they cannot afford to dispense. Later on, the most admirable and lovable character of mediæval Christianity, St. Francis of Assisi, blamed a brother for wanting to keep at least one book, his psalter. Since the Reformation, the most pious sects have seldom been composed of learned people. And the tendency to disparage the pure love of truth and the disinterested search for it is seen in many an attempt, of mediæval and modern times, to press under the iron yoke of authority the aspiring thoughts of a newer culture.

But what does this prove?—not, assuredly, that there is no room for the purest type of intellectual worker within the Church of Christ, but rather that, at certain times under exceptional circumstances, there is a tone and tendency in secular learning which conflicts with that of the dominant religious feelings, perhaps with the most pressing religious needs of the age. So was it when the Word, "to the Greeks foolishness," first began to make its way in Hellenic and Italian lands. So was it again, in some degree, at the time of the Renaissance, and perhaps at that of the French Revolution. But this conflict should be regarded by us as abnormal, seeing that it is as unnecessary as it is pernicious. Would it not have been shocking to those who had been listening to the words of Christ if they had been told that love of truth would one day be set up in opposition to the following of their Master? Almost equally shocking, to the great founders of mediæval learning,

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would have been any supposed antagonism between the cause of wisdom and the cause of God. And now, when the interests of sound learning and of religious reverence have a common enemy in the secularism and materialism of modern life, surely they ought to have common champions in all who uphold (whether from the intellectual or from the purely spiritual side) the lofty ideal of a life devoted to the service of the truth.

#### **IV**

#### ***SECTARIANISM***



## IV

### SECTARIANISM

**W**HILE I was casting about in my mind for some subject that would be interesting and suggestive to members of this society, I came across a passage in the works of a deeply venerated divine of our own days \* that seemed to afford much food for quiet rumination. The writer, in the preface to a second part of his work, is expressing his gratification at the friendly way in which the first part has been received by men of various religious denominations. This sympathetic reception he interprets as significant of a coming change for the better in the relations of Christian Churches and parties: "For there is undoubtedly an increasing body of persons in this country who are rapidly escaping from the restraints of sects; who are not unaware of the new conditions under which the Christianity of the present day exists; and who are ready to join hand and heart in order to give free scope to the essential truths and influences of our religion, in combination with the manly exercise of thought and just concessions to modern knowledge." This was written in 1847, and on asking myself whether the prediction here uttered is, in appear-

\* Rev. James Martineau. "Endeavours after the Christian Life," Preface to 2nd Series, p. xiv.

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ance, being verified, I felt bound to utter a melancholy and reluctant *No*.

This may seem a pessimistic view. I may be reminded that since these words were written the last vestiges of religious persecution in public life have been swept away; that it is much easier now than it was formerly to bring together, for philanthropic purposes, persons of various denominations; that we are far less exclusive, in our choice of literature and of friends, than were our fathers and grandfathers; that comprehensive efforts have been set on foot for bringing about some kind of unity among all bodies of Christians. Yet I cannot consider that the tendency to "escape from the restraints of sects," while retaining a distinctly Christian position in profession and observance, is on the increase. The breaking down of social barriers seems often due to necessity rather than to Christian charity. The union of the Churches seems to many a mirage. At least, it could only unite those who are not far separated, and in any scheme of "union" that I have heard suggested the saintly man whom I have been quoting and his followers would be left out in the cold. Furthermore, I seem to see a recrudescence of that spirit of sectarianism the gradual extinction of which had formed ground of premature exultation.

Nor do I think that the cause is far to seek. Though we are only concerned with England, I may remark in passing that in Roman Catholic countries the hopeless entanglement of religion with politics tends more and more to exaggerate the differences in religious parties, at the same time that it adds to the number of disgusted secularists. In England, happily, such entanglement is far less of a danger. In fact, paradoxical as it may seem, I am inclined to attribute the increase of

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sectarianism and of its blighting shadow, dread of sectarianism, to one of the most invigorating influences of our day, one which arose from and was followed by a revival of zeal and an enthusiasm for devoted work among clergy and laity alike, the Oxford Movement. But before I consider this point further I must make it quite clear what I mean by sectarianism and what I regard as its most dangerous results both social and spiritual.

Now, in the first place, I do not mean to include in sectarianism a genuine and professed attachment to the Church or to the religious denomination to which we belong. By "escaping from the restraints of sects" I should not understand a relapse into the position of an outsider, who would "sit as God, holding no form of creed, but contemplating all." There are the restraints of law and order as well as the restraints of thralldom. And those who acknowledge no restraints from any kind of Church authority are not always to be envied their freedom. Every Church, every well-established branch of every Church, has, like every nation, its own history and its store of memories which its children do well to retain, since by losing them they lose for themselves and for outsiders certain great principles which—such is the one-sidedness of human nature generally—might have been lost for all mankind if a limited number of persons had not at one time regarded them as of paramount importance. We see, for instance, how much we all owe to the Society of Friends for its insistence on the uselessness of outward show without inward reality; to the "people called Methodists" for the great seriousness instilled into them by their founder; to historic High Churchmen for their maintenance of the continuity of the English Church; to Evangelicals for their direct dealing

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with the individual conscience. Some of us have so assimilated the principles of the Church of our birth or baptism that the earliest movement of the religious consciousness in awakening youth was to take to itself the treasures bequeathed by its forefathers. Others, in their days of individualism, have early been moved to a kind of reaction against the forms held up in an imperfect and exaggerated manner before the eyes of childhood, and have voluntarily joined some other religious body that has proved a more congenial resting-place than the Church of their infancy. But in any case, I think that it is safe to appeal to the experience of everybody who has had much to do with the middle classes of English society, in asserting that, as a rule, most people of earnest religious character, except in rare cases of individual genius, find themselves most at home in one particular Church, or in one particular school of a widely comprehensive Church, and that they are none the less efficient members of society in general for recognising their rights and duties of a more particular kind.

Sectarianism, then, I should say, only begins where a person not only belongs, and desires to belong, to a particular Church or division, but where he regards the peculiarities of his Church or sect as more important than either Christianity or the fundamental principles of all religion which has fostered the moral growth of man.

I observe in passing that I do not mean to identify sectarianism with the sin of schism. Schism we may describe as a splitting off from a body to which we should naturally belong, owing to impatience of control or to exaggeration of non-essential differences, or to self-willed desire for fancied originality. Most, if not all, divisions in the Church have begun in schisms, the fault of which is sometimes to be laid to the charge of those who broke

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off, sometimes to that of those who rendered such breach inevitable. It is vain now to wish that no divisions had ever taken place. What is more practically useful is to prevent the lines of cleavage from becoming broader than is necessary, and when possible to fill the lesser ones so that they may disappear entirely.

For practical purposes, then, let us use the word in a broad sense. We need not keep to the old distinction between "the Church" and "the sects," as the kind of party feeling of which I am speaking leads to divisions within Churches, though it may not deserve so harsh a term as *schism*, and there are similarly parties and party associations formed within the large or even the smaller religious sects. Even an association based on common attendance at one particular place of worship seems to serve as a band around a little set of people and a barrier between them and the outside world, even though they might reject with horror the imputation of a tendency to congregationalism. Sectarianism as I am now treating it may be defined as exclusive association based on minor religious affinities in belief and observance.

Now some may be ready to say that we must be strangely indifferent to more formidable foes if we have leisure to pursue those that wear so comparatively mild and harmless an aspect. There has always been more or less of fortuity in the circumstances which have led human beings to associate themselves together, local contiguity having often been a powerful determinant. People who came together for any purpose whatsoever are likely to find that they can best attain other purposes by friendly co-operation, and the friendly feeling itself, however engendered, is not to be lightly esteemed. And where people's religion is of a kind that gives rise to amicable social intercourse, such intercourse is likely to

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be more wholesome than that which is based on love of display or of frivolous pursuits. At worst, its manifestations may seem silly and narrowing rather than positively mischievous. In Australia, in spite of there being no established Church (some people might say by *reason* of there being no religious establishment) there seems to be a more distinct division, for social purposes, into religious sects than there is with us. I heard it said of a lady who wished to start a dancing school in Sydney, that her hope was to "boom" a particular creek of the river in the Baptist persuasion. The connection between dancing lessons and the doctrines of Infant and Adult Baptism is not clear, but it is clear that the Baptists of that particular region hold together as a more or less separated society. But without going to Australia, we often see around us traces of the same tendency. Congregations which worship at one particular Church, whether Anglican or Nonconformist, have often their own book-clubs, literary societies, theatrical entertainments, bicycle excursions, even balls. These may be innocent enough, especially if strangers who do not belong to the charmed circle are sometimes hospitably received within it. Yet they strike us as unnatural. In a way their influence is narrowing, for they tend to restrict the mental and spiritual atmosphere in which young people are brought up and older people habitually dwell, and are somewhat of a hindrance to that wholesome interchange of thought and sympathetic combination for useful work which are necessary to keep any society sweet and strong.

This part of our subject borders on that of sectarianism in education, as to which there is much to be said, from different points of view. Now every one who knows anything about children, about the tenacity of habits formed

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early in life, the prevalence of hero-worship among the very youngest, the keen susceptibility of growing and intelligent minds to new ideas, and I would add the intolerance which is engrained in boy-and-girl nature, is bound to feel some sympathy with parents or pastors who desire that all school influence and instruction shall act in the same lines as those of the Church which claims the child as its own. On the other hand, it would be difficult to overestimate the benefit that children who are being brought up within restricted lines, in widely separated spheres of social and religious ideas, may derive from free intercourse with others, on such a footing of equality that no standard is acknowledged but that of individual excellence—whether moral, mental, or physical. Of course it is easy to say that “religious instruction should be left to the home,” but we know that in the majority of homes, whether through business, idleness, incompetency, or simple non-recognition of any such duty on the part of the parents, it is not and is not likely to be imparted in any but a fragmentary way. On the other hand, it is not always easy (though I venture to think that the difficulty is exaggerated) to find teachers who are capable of giving good and really educative religious instruction without laying over-much stress on doctrines dear to them and peculiar to their own church or sect which would prove a stumbling-block to the parents of many of their children,—which would prove a stumbling-block in after-days to the children themselves when they come to realise the discrepancies between home and school teaching. Now this difficulty, with its remedy—the increase of denominational schools—is due to that very tendency which seems to me deplorable. Sectarianism, and what I have called its shadow, the fear of sectarianism, are working for evil in education

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in various ways. I will only dwell on two effects which have come under my special observation.

The first and most obvious is the spread of entirely secular systems of education from which all religious books and religious ideas are excluded. The mischief of this from a non-religious and purely literary point of view is sufficiently evident. The Bible was translated in the happiest moment of the history of our language, and its traces are easily seen in all good literature ever since. Before that time, the matter, rather than the words, of the Bible and the doctrine taught in Church had a yet larger proportionate influence on thought, learning, and letters. Without knowledge—a real and intimate knowledge—of the Bible, the literature and history of any Christian country are incomprehensible. One can imagine children having to “get up” parts of the Bible to understand Milton, as some people “get up” parts of Plutarch to understand Shakespeare. But the very fact that they should have to do so proves that the best literary food of their forefathers has been taken from them. I need not, however, stop with this one stricture. Assuredly though the Bible has been far worse abused than any other book, though it has often served as a repository of arms with which to fight opponents, and though its words have been sacrilegiously used to obstruct the growth of natural and historical knowledge; though even some whose apparent reverence has bestowed on it the name of the Eternal Logos which properly belongs to an aspect of Divinity itself—have played fast and loose with its most sacred utterances; yet who would not have the Bible, perverted, misunderstood, misapplied, yet in some degree revered and verbally known among us, rather than that it should come to belong to the curiosities of literature? We can

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hardly realise what the change would be, but it is no far-off possibility that the lofty characters, the home-coming rebukes, the strains of hope and comfort that are the familiar possession of the very poor among us may lose that familiarity, and with it the tendency to recur in the dark and critical moments of life.

This is not a fancy picture. We often find that in good private schools teachers avoid the danger of offending parents by cutting religious instruction out of the school curriculum. We know only too well the difficulties raised—more often, I believe, from a theoretical than from a practical point of view—in elementary schools, which threaten to leave us with two rival systems face to face: one of instruction in the doctrines and formularies of the Church of England, and one of secularism pure and simple. The principle of secularity in Government schools is carried to its logical results in some parts of Australia, where the secondary as well as the primary schools are under Government control. The books used and the instruction given are so arranged as to avoid anything that might suggest a religious idea. Thus a lady who had taught in Queensland, told me that in Longfellow's "Wreck of the Hesperus," as it appeared in a selection of poems for school recitation, the prayer of the skipper's daughter as the ship went down was expunged, as being too denominational. Now for the reasons I have given already, and for others on which I cannot enter now, I should be sorry to see all schools set on a strictly denominational basis. But however much we wished such a consummation, we could not attain it. The Nonconformists in England, at least in the lower-middle and lower classes, and the sects that correspond to them in our colonies, have no wish for denominational schools of their own, and at the same time would prefer

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entire secularism to any sort of teaching that emphasised points of doctrine and ritual on which Churchmen and Dissenters are not agreed. And on the other hand, we must generally feel that to prevent a teacher who is also a really religious man or woman from using freely his or her best powers in the service of the pupils, to whom the school may be the one civilising and moralising agent in life, is to throw away one of our best arms of national defence against the uncertain future. How is the problem to be solved? Are Christians so divergent in their views that some of the points on which they differ are really vital, or can any compromise be reached, any way found of giving really useful and inspiring teaching without stirring sectarian conflict? I leave the problem unsolved, hoping that at least a practical mode of solution will be found by those here present who have to face the educational difficulties of the future.

But there is another evil result of sectarianism and the dread of sectarianism in the educational world. The qualifications sought in a teacher of the subjects that come under the head of "religious knowledge" do not, as a rule, include even a fair acquaintance with those subjects obtained by systematic study. By headmistresses seeking assistants, I have often been asked whether a candidate for a post were a Churchwoman, or if she regularly attended church or chapel, but never, as far as I remember, whether she had given or was willing to give any proof of having seriously studied either Bible or Prayer-Book. The former questions might not have been superfluous. It might not be unreasonable to make sure that the teacher would treat these subjects in a reverent manner. Yet she might—she often does—treat them with respect, while knowing very little about them. A little while ago, staying with a conscientious

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teacher, I observed what pains she took to understand for herself and to explain to the girls some difficult but most important points in Scripture history, such as the relations of the major prophets with the Kings of Israel. Had she been taking the same kind of trouble in clearing up difficulties in English or Roman history, I should not have been surprised, but really careful and critical study of Scripture is hardly ever demanded of teachers and encouraged even in the upper forms of good public schools.\*

But I must pass on to other regions in which sectarianism bears bad fruit. In philanthropic work, it may be hoped that there is a change for the better, though the prejudice of some good people against the work of the C.O.S. and similar agencies is by no means extinct. In some country places schemes for doing good to a particular class, such as factory girls, are still wrecked on the shoals of Church and Dissent. The difficulty is in some places complicated by the fact that the parish system, if thoroughly and consistently worked upon, would exclude anything like knight-errant enterprise. Now it is well known that often in an inadequately-served parish some of the poor are neglected, either physically or spiritually. Then a band of Nonconformists rushes into the breach and supplies all or part of what was lacking. After a time, a more vigorous clergyman appears, the parish is reorganised, and the Nonconformists, unless they are willing to give up the good work they have begun, continue as before, so that soon we have two rival sets of mothers' meetings, provident societies, soup-kitchens, and the like. This is a deplorable waste of power, when we consider how much

\* The question of Sectarianism and Education is resumed in the Essay on Religious Teaching in Schools.

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room there is for work of the kind in our overcrowded cities. And it is difficult to see how it is to be avoided, as it is hardly to be expected that Nonconformists will respect parochial divisions when they see real need for their labours, or that parish clergy will give up part of their spheres of action.

One can only hope that in each special case mutual forbearance will, if possible, agree to some division of labour, and we may well be thankful that there are now many ways of actively helping the poor without being strictly associated with any particular church or chapel. The "overlapping" of charities is in great part due to sectarian rivalry. Happily, most people see and are ready to laugh at the strange results it produces. Perhaps this is the first step towards effectual prevention in the future.

But there is a far more serious part of our subject which I feel it necessary to dwell upon for a few minutes. I cannot feel sure that all here present will agree with what I have to say, and I hope that those who differ from me will not hesitate to express afterwards their view of the case. I refer to the way in which sectarianism produces, and is in turn greatly augmented by, a growing objection of Christians belonging to different denominations to take part in common acts of worship.

If this objection is really a growing force, it is one that in the interests of Christian unity and brotherly kindness ought to be checked. For nothing in the world is so potent in bringing men together, in making them feel that they participate in common hopes, conflicts, and impulses, in leading them back from superficial differences to the broad foundation of a common spiritual life, as the participation in common acts of worship. None of us would desire to abolish all differences in forms of

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worship. The enforcement of uniformity has not, in Church history, proved an infallible guide to unity. And the greater the divergence of taste, habit, and culture among us, the less likelihood is there of one form being found equally adapted to the needs of all. But for this very reason it seems all the more desirable to encourage all opportunities that may arise for those of one denomination to join occasionally in the services of another, and above all, to set up no barriers by which conscience would be forced to oppose what human feeling and religious longing would both prescribe.

But is not this a chimerical fear? Do not most people, nowadays, who go to church or chapel, frequent one place of worship or another as inclination dictates? Among the various Dissenting bodies, is not interchange of pulpits more free and frequent than formerly? Does *any* preacher, of any denomination, who has the gift of eloquence, fail to attract large congregations? Is not the "wandering" tendency of roving round after ecclesiastical celebrities more consistent with the character of the present day than the habit of keeping, Sunday after Sunday, to the habits we have been accustomed to, and which, if they are not kept to as a matter of duty, commonly lose all power for good?

Now within limits this objection seems forcible. No one could seriously advise for grown-up people habitual or even occasional attendance at services which are uncongenial to the nature of the supposed worshipper. Any one who has been compelled thus to attend uncongenial services must know that the practice is not only wearisome but demoralising, to say nothing of the fact that it often obliges the unwilling auditor to forego the privilege of joining in some form of worship that would for him have a real and solemn meaning. I think

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that the necessary diversity in religious services is to be deplored, and I think that in some ways we are at a disadvantage with religious people in Roman Catholic countries, where rich and poor, respectable and vagabond, kneel together, join in the same words, and use all the same forms, though with many differences of meaning. But we must take things as they are, and with us, in England, there are, both in the Anglican Church and among Nonconformists, forms of service suited to the *élite*, to the *bourgeoisie*, to the masses—instruction addressed to the educated, the half-taught, and the ignorant—forms and ceremonies which please few, or many, or all, or possibly none. I believe that the attendance at one kind of church or another depends far more with many people on their taste than on their convictions,\* and such people need to be reminded of the claims which the Church to which they belong has on their allegiance. But this fact does not militate against the other of which I was speaking: the assumption sometimes made that it is positively wrong for those of one denomination to attend the services of another, more particularly for Anglicans to attend the services of Nonconformists.

For any who have not been accustomed all their lives, or all the time of thoughtful, responsible life, to hear this assumption made, it is difficult to understand how it could ever be justified to any enlightened conscience. Granted that every separation from the Church was occasioned or accompanied by the sin of schism on the part of somebody, whether of the outgoers, or of the dominant party within, or of both alike, it is hardly possible for the narrowest Churchman to regard as schismatic those meetings for direction and instruction

\* See Essay on Religion and Good Taste.

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which nourish the spiritual life of the majority of English speaking people who profess the Christian religion. He could hardly say that every Nonconformist had merited the curse of the Psalmist, "Let his prayer be turned into sin." And if it is not sinful for them to pray together, why is it sinful for others to pray with them? Those Church-people who refuse on every occasion to attend a Nonconformist service, even when conducted with perfect decorum and accompanied by a really profitable sermon and at the same time urge Nonconformists to attend as often as possible the services of the Church of England, assume an attitude of superiority which is naturally most galling to their Dissenting friends, and would confer a certain merit on a degree of ignorance as to the religious usages of people in the next street, of which they would feel ashamed if such people lived in Kamschatka.

Let me not be mistaken. I would not have Church-people undervalue their privileges. In fact I should not venture to speak as I do if I were not myself a member of the Church of England, and if I did not value my membership at a high rate. But it is no part of good Churchmanship to refuse an occasional opportunity of hearing a helpful address or of joining in worship with those whom one loves and respects, from any fastidious scruples on points of doctrine and discipline. A spiritual change of air is sometimes as refreshing as a sea-breeze. I remember how stimulating it felt, one Sunday evening, in a seaport town, after being wearied with the conventionalities of a fashionable church, to stumble into a fishermen's meeting-house, where the people were singing lively hymns with great energy, each member of the congregation being eager for the privilege of choosing the next, and where, between the hymns, a nautical-

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looking man read, with sundry notes and comments, the story of St. Paul's shipwreck to an audience that knew well what the perils of the sea really are. Again, my mind goes back to the hall of a Northumbrian castle, where I once heard a learned Quaker talking simply but never talking *down* to the peasants of the country-side, who showed, at various parts of the service, how highly they appreciated his ministrations. But it is not only with fisherfolk and labourers that one gains more sympathy by occasional attendance at their services. I would not be without the recollection of learned discourses delivered in an earnest and reverent manner by ministers of Scotch and of non-Episcopal English Churches. One may *read* discourses afterwards, if they are printed, but even the best usually lose something in the process of reduction to paper. And although the gift of extempore prayer is now, it seems to me, confined to very few, since it requires rare simplicity of faith, combined with great power of language in any man, for him to be perfectly natural and self-forgetful in leading the prayers of a congregation: yet where such a power does exist—I have known it in three or four people only—its exercise produces an effect on the hearers which does not easily pass away.

The Bunsen family, familiar and highly respected by the Arnolds, the Foxes, and much of the most enlightened society of half a century ago, used, when in England, to go round to various churches and chapels, and to think that something must be amiss in their spiritual state if they failed to enter into the highest ideas of any. It would not be profitable for most of us to try a similar experiment. If we did, it is not at our own door that we should probably lay the blame of our want of edification. But if there is any fear lest the

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charms of eloquent discourse and beautiful music, or even of pleasant companionship in the walk to and from church should lead some weak-kneed people to become irregular in fulfilling their obligations towards their own Churches, those who would trace this neglect and all its possible consequences to the fact that they had once been induced to enter any assembly other than their own, would be using the infinitely tiresome and deluding argument of the "thin end of the wedge."

I shall not speak so decidedly on the question whether it is advisable or lawful that Churchmen and Nonconformists should, except on most special occasions, communicate together. As a rule, it would seem undesirable, partly from the reason that in many—not all—religious bodies, the essential point of membership in this or that Church lies in the fact of being a communicant in it. To some of us the idea that the fact of receiving or not receiving the Eucharist according to a particular form, marks us as belonging to a particular Church, sect, or party, may seem almost as odious as the choice of a similar test for determining—as in England during the last century—whether one were fit to receive political privileges. I cannot see how any but "weaker brethren" can be offended by a common participation of any Christians in the most solemn of Christian rites. But the whole question opens up unending questions as to necessary discipline. Let us only insist now on the principle that no member of any Christian denomination ought, by pledge or otherwise, to debar himself from attending, when he deems it right and expedient, the services proper to some other denomination. He who does so both forfeits part of his Christian liberty and cuts off many chances of manifesting and of heightening his Christian charity.

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The reason why I have dwelt so long on this part of my subject is its present practical importance and its bearing on what seems to me the main block in the way of the opponents of modern sectarianism. I said, almost at the outset of our discussion, that I regarded the much-to-be-lauded Oxford Movement as partly responsible for the unsatisfactory state of things. Now the leaders of the Oxford Movement opened the eyes of Churchmen in many ways. They helped men to realise, or at least to consider with attention, the idea of the Church. They helped to break up narrow and partial views of the character and history of the Anglican Church. Perhaps their history was not always quite accurate, but when the appeal to history is once established, a great battle is gained. They taught the need of discipline, for clergy and laity. Above all, they gave a seriousness and a definiteness to the conception of real Christianity which spread far beyond the circle, or even the Church, in which the movement arose. They protested, in words and actions, against the identification of Christianity with a vague general kindliness, and against the tendency, very noticeable among sentimental writers, to smooth away all the less agreeable and comforting passages of Christian doctrine. So far, their influence was inestimably beneficial. But they, or some of their followers, have occasionally overshot the mark. In their hatred of sloth, they have roused men to zealous wrath against supposed foes who were friends in disguise. In impatience of vague fluidity of thought, they have sometimes tried to grasp and to define ideas which transcend all definite thought, whether clear or confused. In their zeal for ecclesiastical discipline, they have tended to multiply rules, which would lay on us a burden such as neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear.

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Is there no *via media*? Must we follow either sectarianism or laxity? Are charity and tolerance after all only to be found in company with indifference?

I think not. I believe that the most fiery zeal may be tamed to nerve the cause of the holiest and broadest charity, that our difficulties in these, as in most regions, are due rather to ourselves than to any defect in the whole system of things around us; that the First and great Commandment sets no limits to the obligations of the Second.

What we really want is to be raised into a higher atmosphere, to lead a larger life, to become familiar with great ideas. While we dwell among the wrangle of the sects we hear their discords. At a distance the jarring cries blend into a pleasing roll of sound. True we must live among them, must, as duty dictates, ally ourselves with one against another. But it is most refreshing to withdraw ourselves at times to different regions. Sectarianism, like a spoilt child, becomes more troublesome the more it is indulged. To ignore differences is unwise; to assume a uniformity that does not exist is dishonest; to throw into the background all that has ever given rise to controversy is cowardly in spirit and colourless in effects. "Unsectarian," like most negative expressions, is a term that inspires no enthusiasm on one side and much rancour on the other. "Supersectarianism" is a term that might better describe the tone of mind we require at the present day. It might often be fitly applied to simple and unlearned people whom converse with great themes has raised above all party differences. It ought to be merited by all educated thinkers of our day who have had the opportunity of seeing sects and parties at their best and at their worst. But none of us could lay claim to it unless our contempt

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for the partial were due to our apprehension of the whole, our rejection of human distinctions to our discernment of such as are eternal and divine. Better be faithful to a one-sided manifestation of the truth than indifferent to truth altogether. But this is not the choice that lies before us. We have not to choose between farthing candles and dense darkness. Throw open the windows, let in the light of day, and the candles may safely be left to go out of themselves.

V

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## V

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OUR subject to-day is not an unfamiliar one. The fact that the age we live in is one of ceaseless action and exhausting effort is generally admitted by optimists and pessimists alike, though what optimists would eulogise as progressive activity, pessimists may stigmatise as feverish unrest. Without attempting to judge between them, I would find in their agreement as to the fact a basis on which we all might join to consider its practical importance. For it is evident that the very best of tendencies may become pernicious through one-sided exaggeration, and also that the discovery of a bad tendency among us, if we have any spark of manly courage, should lead not to a cynical despair of society, but to a combined and intelligent effort to meet and counteract the evil. And thus, if I may have nothing to offer you but some commonplace observations on a trite subject, I hope my apology will be accepted: that trite subjects are those of which it is most important for us to realise the full significance, and that commonplace thoughts must be patiently dwelt upon before they can be translated into reasonable action.

If we had leisure to run over the principal fields of modern thought and life, we should see how they are

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all pervaded by a spirit of ceaseless activity. We cannot read or think about any branch of economics, literature, politics, art, or even philosophy, without realising the prevalence of that spirit in its two cognate forms—of competition, or the struggle of men and of classes of men against one another, and of restlessness, the never ceasing desire for change, which betokens a want of harmony between man and his physical or moral environment. I will consider briefly some of the symptoms of this spirit in three regions—in society, in the pursuit of knowledge, and in religious thought and action, and some of the causes of its great prevalence at the present day.

Look, then, first, at the competition and the restlessness which pervades social life at the present time. Everybody is struggling for something, either for a living or for what he regards as better living—for elbow-room or for a position of vantage. Most people who work at all are forced to put so much energy into their work that if it is long continued they must necessarily break down ; in fact, we probably all know many people who are alternately all through life in a state of leisureless and anxious effort, and of complete inactivity for the sake of recuperation, and one fears sometimes that this alternation of overstrain and collapse will come to be regarded as the normal condition of life. The cry for more holidays and more frequent change of surroundings is constantly heard nowadays. If it means that we all want to be more than mere mechanical workers, and that we feel more than our fathers did the need of time for cultivating our individual tastes and developing our various faculties, well and good. But if it means that all children in schools and men engaged in business and professions, and domestic servants, and even ladies occu-

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pied with social duties, are habitually so absorbed and so over-wrought that they need long periods of distraction and of inactivity to wind them up to recommence the same round of slavish toil, then we may well ask if it would not be better economy of time and strength to arrange people's occupations and rest so that there should be less continual overstrain, and that holidays might become rather an occasional and helpful pleasure than an imperious necessity of life.

But such a suggestion would seem very unpractical to those who are exerting themselves to the top of their bent for fear lest they should be overtaken and defeated in life's race. The competition for employment in all professions and occupations (except a few, such as that of domestic service, which are apparently being improved off the face of the earth) is due to circumstances which are beyond the reach of individual would-be reformers. It is chiefly owing to our rapid increase of population and to the demolition of many of the social barriers which formerly kept at least some regions exempt from the pressure of competition. Modern democratic reforms have increased, both for men and for women, the competition in all those occupations which are considered respectable, and demand a certain amount of education such as a good many are now able to obtain. And I would notice here that while democratic progress has given us what the French call a "career open to talent," it has not exactly succeeded in providing a quiet and useful corner for mediocrity, or no career to want of talent. The son of a day-labourer, if he be really clever and pushing, may sometimes obtain, by means of scholarships from primary schools and other helps, an education which will enable him to enter one of the learned professions or give him a start

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in the commercial world which will set him on the way to making a fortune. But the son of a professional or of a wealthy commercial man cannot, without bringing disgrace upon himself, sink into the position of a day-labourer, though he may be naturally better fitted for that mode of life than for the one into which he was born. It is well for him if he is contented with being no wealthier and no more distinguished than his father. It is frequently remarked that young people whose parents have risen from the ranks commonly insist on making their start in life from the point which their parents only reached after years of laborious effort and frugal living. A young lady married from a home in which four or five servants are kept thinks that a lesser number is incompatible with civilised existence. Similarly, to many people such indulgences as electric light, motor cars, half a dozen daily postal deliveries, two or three months annually spent in foreign travel, are regarded as almost necessities of life. We almost all fix our standard of expenditure by that of those in our circle of society who have the largest means, and consequently men overwork themselves and women harass themselves to prevent the horror of having to lower that standard and confess that it never should have been theirs. And while, with this incessant growth in our conception of the "necessaries of life," we make more and more demands on our physical and social environment, that environment has its revenge by becoming more and more exacting in its demands on us. It is at once pathetic and amusing to see how toilsome a life is that of many of those who belong to what are regarded from below—and not without some reason—as the idle classes. Some time ago a fashionable lady published her woes in the *Nineteenth Century*. She was compelled

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to govern a houseful of servants and to arbitrate in their frequent dissensions, to see that satisfactory relations prevailed between her children and those she employed to instruct them, to ride and drive with her husband, to call on the ladies belonging to her wide circle of acquaintance, to act the lady-bountiful to the poor of the parish, to take the chair at political or philanthropic meetings, to give large dinner-parties, in which the food must be *recherché* and the company well chosen; finally—though this being put last, generally became lost in the crowd of other duties—to keep abreast of the intellectual movements of the time, and to keep up a little “soul” by reading Herbert Spencer. Yet this poor lady’s hard fate probably drew no tears from the eyes of her readers. She had evidently not put to herself the question, in relation to her “necessary” duties, “On what compulsion must I? Tell me that.” Those whose life is thus consumed in the laborious performance of functions which contribute little, if anything, to the wealth or well-being of the society by the labour of which they are maintained, are not likely to be able much longer to close their ears to the voice of the genuine workers who cannot see any real necessity for the existence of such a class at all. But it is not my present task to venture any speculations as to the changes at hand in our social system. I merely wished to show how the wear and tear of life tells alike on the upper and on the lower classes of society, though it is more futile among the rich than among the poor.

To turn to the region of intellectual pursuits. It is evident that the effort and wasted energy in this sphere is a part of the great social struggle already touched upon, since for the majority of English people the only object of such pursuits is either to facilitate

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living comfortably and easily or to help the individual student to "get on in the world." A good deal has been said of late about the demoralising effects of competition on education and learning with which I heartily agree, though within certain limits competition seems to me so essentially bound up with the principles of democracy that I see no way of escaping from it entirely. I believe it to be more effectively pernicious in the lower than in the higher branches of education, though we all have had rather bitter experience of its cramping and lowering effect on university studies. It is almost impossible for us to live in an atmosphere of competition and at the same time to form true and rational estimates of the relative value and importance of various courses of study and intellectual achievements. But perhaps after all there is less need to make complaints of this kind here than in most other places. I believe that there is in this university and in our college a good deal of sincere and loyal devotion to the cause of truth—a practical belief in the worth of knowledge for its own sake, though to many of us intellectual and material success must be associated in thought as they are in fact. But what we suffer from chiefly, it seems to me, is not so much the prevalence of sordid ambition or of nervous terror lest we should be outstripped by our companions, as the hurry and over-pressure resulting from the necessity of compressing long courses of study into a comparatively brief period of time. Our terms here are so short that some people think it almost necessary to strain every nerve while they last, and trust to the vacations for recovery of the overstrained faculties. Our whole college course is so short that some may think it best to devote all their time and all their energy to making the most of the opportunities

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within their reach and to postpone to a later day any gratifications of their physical or social or artistic nature. Or if physical pursuits be regarded as necessary, they, too, lose their character of leisureliness, and tend to promote rather than prevent exhaustion. Of course, an entirely one-sided mode of life, being incompatible with a "sound mind in a sound body," is in the long run inimical to good intellectual work of any kind. More haste here, as in other departments, means less speed. A hurried and worried mind becomes incapable of successful effort, and fails, it may be, at the critical moment, or perhaps in the subsequent life of lower tone and exhausted energy. But as the distinction between healthy tension and morbid overstrain cannot be discerned according to any rule that can be laid down, but varies in different individuals, it is generally very difficult to warn those who are incurring dangers of this kind until they learn wisdom in the hard school of experience.

I said that the same tendency to wear and tear was likewise visible in the religious life of the present day. Yet all would agree that here such an influence was most earnestly to be deprecated. For a man's religion ought to be the most calming and steadying force in his nature, and if it tends to unrest, how is that nature ever to be brought to peace and harmony? Yet if we take up any religious newspapers or listen to any kind of religious discussion, are we not most painfully impressed with the rivalry of sects and parties, the polemical tone of thinkers who would fain be impartial? Even if for a moment men of all schools and all parties unite to admire with reverence some peculiar manifestation of that Christian character which is felt to be above all sectarian divisions—as happened at the death of the

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late Father Damien—in a very short time the Church to which that saint had belonged is challenged by another religious body which asserts that it has produced greater saints of a similar character, and the generous warmth of enthusiasm is chilled by the biting spirit of petty rivalry. This rivalry is even less justifiable now than in earlier days. All religious bodies have felt certain waves of thought which have borne them in somewhat similar directions. It is not hard to persuade men of widely different opinions to combine for purposes of philanthropic work or even of amicable discussion. It is no longer regarded as a great stretch of Christian charity to include within the pale of the Church persons whose views are very materially different from one's own. But if sectarian bitterness is less rife among us than it was, what there is left of it is rendered more conspicuous by the tendency, inseparable perhaps from the democratic spirit of the age, to appeal to public opinion as arbitrator between rival parties. Meantime the tendency to overstrain is as visible in religious life and work as anywhere else. The over-worked clergyman who destroys his nervous system and perhaps shortens his days by true-hearted but short-sighted devotion to his work, is as familiar a figure among us as is the over-worked scholar or man of business. Among the laity, the tendency to excitement followed by reaction is often powerful. One institution which has of late become very popular—that of religious retreats—though excellent in many ways, and no doubt of great service, seems, in concentrating into a short period the spiritual refreshment which the hurry of life forbids to be diffused over a longer time, to be somewhat similar to the practice of making holidays a necessity by persistent over-exertion in ordinary work.

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But if there is all this unrest and rivalry among those who still profess the Christian religion in some form or another, are not the same tendencies yet more remarkable in the religious life and thought of those who do not come under any particular religious denomination? I should hesitate to say that the religious spirit is more addicted to strange vagaries now than at any other period of the world's history. There has been more than one period in the olden times in which the human spirit having broken through the chains of established usage and traditional authority and not reconciled itself to the narrow bounds of secular work and definite knowledge, has run riot in a tangled wood of extravagant and overgrown fancies. But perhaps such aberrations are more grotesque at the present time than they have been formerly because of the contrast they afford to the matter-of-fact unimaginative life of those English and American people to whom theosophic and spiritualist theories often appeal so strangely. Perhaps the most extravagant forms of religious exaggeration are the most innocuous to us, owing to our British bulwark of common-sense which shuts us off alike from many inspiring ideas and from more wild delusions. Yet in the two opposite tendencies we may observe around us, —to dismiss the thought of the spiritual and supernatural altogether and to dwell with morbid fascination on inexplicable manifestations of occult forces—we may alike discern that restless impatience which cannot wait out nor work out the great problems of life, that cannot realise at once the limitations of human faculties and the vastness of human aspirations.

Now before we go on to consider along what lines we ought to look for the remedies to this disease of the day, I would repeat the remark already made, that all of

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these distressing symptoms may be regarded as exaggerations or perversions of tendencies innocent in themselves—nay, of tendencies to which all that is most vigorous and most worthy in modern life is directly due. Take them as we may, they prove that we are alive. Feverish heat is better than the numbness which precedes death. And I suppose that in the opinion of most of us it is better that we should elbow one another for a place in the world than that we should maintain unquestioningly the places assigned to us in a rigid system of caste—better that we should make the whole field of knowledge a racecourse than that we should be satisfied with ignorance—better even that we should suffer from alternate inroads of scepticism and fanaticism than that we should acquiesce stupidly in any doctrinal system which we have inherited from our fathers but not realised for ourselves.

Happily, however, none of these alternative courses are presented for our choice. If we are fully awake to the dangers most incident to our time, we may endeavour to guard against them without adopting a policy of retrogression.

I do not purpose to enter in detail into all the remedies that have been suggested by various persons at various times, but would confine myself to a few remarks on three or four that appear to me most obvious ;—plainer living, the maintenance of a high intellectual ideal, patience and reticence in religious inquiry, in general a recognition that tangible results are not always the things to be most desired.

We have often heard the cry raised for “plain living and high thinking,” but it does not ever seem to have aroused much response among us. Perhaps the failure of the cause is due to the confusion of *plain living* with

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*cheap and nasty living*, with slovenly and sordid modes of life, such as we shall all be ready to condemn. Indeed we may be sure that plain living, in the sense of rational and unostentatious living, would be cheap and pleasant, whereas ostentatious and would-be luxurious and fashionable living is often nasty without being cheap. The change that I would wish to see made is a revision of our list—I mean of the list that we practically make, each for ourselves—of the “necessaries of life,” and the striking out of all such as are not of vital importance to health, decency, culture, social amenity and morality. I do not in the least mean that we should abjure all that we exclude from our list of necessities. I am not arguing the question from an ascetic point of view, though certainly there is something to be said for the Stoic idea that each man should be sufficient for himself and independent of mere outward possessions—and yet more for the Christian idea that the kingdom of God is “hardly entered” by those who are rich in this world’s goods. Standing for the present on lower ground, one may see how fatal to a calm tone of mind and body is the restlessness with which many people struggle to “keep up a position” in life. Let us retain our luxuries, if we can do so with a clear conscience, but let us provide for necessities first. And among necessities let us put prominently forward freedom from harassing and fruitless cares. In this sphere more than in any other we need to follow Dr. Johnson’s advice to “clear the mind of cant.” If our minds were thus clear, housekeepers would not be afraid of being thought niggardly if in providing food they considered what was wholesome and desirable rather than what was prescribed by any particular social standard. Ladies with deft fingers and abundance of

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leisure would not regard it as a painful infliction, or as a shame not to be acknowledged publicly, if they undertook personally some of the manual work of the household. Sociable people would not be debarred from having a wide and congenial circle of acquaintances by the consciousness that such acquaintances would feel grossly insulted if invited to the kind of meal (however abundant and pleasant) that their host could afford without heavy additional expense. At the present day all the best gratifications of life—physical, æsthetic, and intellectual—may be had at so low a cost that there would be no great hardness in economy but for the stigma cast upon it. We want to have it more clearly recognised as moral principles that all men and women ought to live well within their income and make some provision for the future. And on the other hand that for the income to be increased beyond what is necessary for health and security, at the expense of the physical, mental, and moral well-being of the bread-winner, is calamitous for himself and disgraceful to those for whom the sacrifice is made. If these principles were frankly adopted in practice as they would be, I suppose, generally admitted in theory, the restless overstrain of society would be considerably diminished.

Again, in intellectual life we cannot diminish the wear and tear until we have cleared away a good many false notions and decided within our own minds what we are aiming at and why we regard it as worthy of our efforts. All knowledge that stimulates and strengthens the mental powers while engaged in its pursuit and that when attained can be absorbed, as it were, into the mental system, to enrich and ennoble the whole life, is a thing worth making great sacrifices for, and often such sacrifices are necessary. Those who give up

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wealth and position, or it may be robust health and family life, to dedicate all their powers to the pursuit of knowledge, are martyrs in a good cause and benefactors of mankind. But the overworked scholar of the kind most frequently seen among us is generally neither a hero nor a martyr, but one who mistaking means for ends has sacrificed his intellectual as well as his physical well-being to the chance of academic distinction, lucrative emoluments, or literary fame and standing. True, while a livelihood and a position in the world depends on academic success, and academic success depends on the concentrated labour of a very few years, it is difficult for prudent persons to avoid all anxiety in study, though they may know that anxiety confuses all notions as to relative magnitudes and prevents really good work from being done at all. One's last resource with over-anxious persons is to assure them that even the nearer objects at which they are aiming are best reached by being habitually ignored,—that even success in examinations depends far more on vigour of mind and on a really intelligent grasp of what is known than on the accumulations of undigested facts and the hollow artifices for concealing ignorance in which the jaded, over-wrought mind sometimes confides,—that an enlightened self-interest would recommend the same course as would the loftiest idealism. Those who take up the cry against overwork sometimes do more harm than good by easy-going advice which would dissuade from strenuous effort altogether. What we want as a rule is not *less* work, but less hurried, feverish work—work wisely intermingled with periods of *bonâ fide* relaxation and of quiet reflection on the results obtained. In intellectual as in material things, we need to distinguish between luxuries and necessities, and here

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the power of steady advancement and of quiet reflection should be set down among the most necessary things of all.

If we pass on to the third region with which I promised to deal, that of speculative inquiry and religious belief, it becomes more difficult to say anything that is not either insipid or misleading. In this region, almost more than in the other two, a period of feverish unrest often seems, both for societies and for individuals, the necessary prelude to a state of calm and stability. And here the danger is very great, lest in seeking an escape from such unrest we should come to satisfy ourselves with anything short of the very largest measure of truth that it may be given us to attain. But this rule at least may be laid down, that all search after religious truth should be reverent, generally silent, always patient. Here, if anywhere, it is necessary to learn—a hard lesson in all circumstances—to suspend judgment. To those who perceive most clearly the supreme importance of certain and rightful judgments on that which concerns us more closely than anything else, such suspension of judgment is often extremely painful. They are tempted to fly to polemical literature, to look out eagerly for any new explanation offered of the points in controversy, to adopt half-understood solutions of half-realised difficulties. Now the reason why all this is so futile is that the primary religious beliefs, lying beyond the scope of adequate logical proof and of precise verbal definition, cannot be taught or explained by one person to another in quite the same way as propositions in physical or mathematical science. In realising its relation to God the human soul realises its separateness from all its companions, from its whole environment. Of course we know that religion is a strong band, the strongest band

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there is for joining and keeping men together in societies. We know also that within limits the results of religious experience may be imparted and shared, and that if there be sympathy to a certain degree, religious emotion and zeal may be readily communicated. But each individual soul has its own peculiar difficulties, its own special spiritual capacities. No generally satisfactory solution has ever been found of the enigmas that have tormented the mind of man from the days of Job, though every earnest and thoughtful mind has had to find some practical solution. The greatest religious teachers have accomplished their task, not so much by working out difficult religious questions as by pointing out to their disciples, in the inmost soul of each, a way of access to the Eternal Source of all wisdom and strength. To acquire a definite opinion on all the religious questions of the day is not a burden that rests upon us all, and those that feel bound to take it up should, above all things, beware of hasty conclusions on matters that need deep study and much pondering. Twenty-five years is not too long a time for the formation of a coherent set of religious opinions, though twenty-five minutes may be too long to rest without any religious basis to our life and conduct.

For, after all, the main cause of the distraction and worry that often makes our lives burdensome to us is a certain superficiality and materialism, a want of power to see things in their real proportions. There are some persons who seem, in the most harassing circumstances, to live in a profound calm, because they realise that in comparison with the Unchangeable all that is vexatious and contradictory is but as the surface agitation of the stormy sea to the calm depths below, because they entirely believe that "the things which are seen are

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temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Such persons are not selfish quietists, standing aloof from the warfare of their brothers. Quietism, as I understand it, consists in the maintenance of a happy passivity of feeling. True and healthy quietness of mind must make action far more vigorous, because it frees it from the petty friction that hampers so many of our best efforts. The more we understand the real issues of the warfare in which we are engaged and the real character of our foes, the less shall we waste our strength in futile efforts. And such an understanding we are not likely to attain till we lose something of our impatient longing for tangible results, and care more for conformity to reasonable and abiding principles.

VI

*SYMBOLISM IN RELIGION*



## VI

### SYMBOLISM IN RELIGION

ALL life is a perpetual conflict, in the world of mind as in that of matter. If the struggle ceases, stagnation and degeneracy must needs follow. This seems a melancholy truth both to those who naturally love peace better than war, and more particularly to those who would fain bring into harmonious combination all that seems most admirable to them in two opposite camps. We must, however, take things as they are, and endeavour to understand rather than to minimise the differences which have been the source at some times of hopeless and bitter controversy, at others of a stimulating and wholesome rivalry. If we do this we shall probably find that the root of such differences commonly lies in a deep-seated diversity of type of mind and character, often, to all appearance, independent of education, race, and mode of life. Thus we hear it said sometimes that every man is born a Platonist or an Aristotelian, an Epicurean or a Stoic, a Christian or a Pagan, a Catholic or a Protestant, a Liberal or a Conservative. It may be that these divisions, like most divisions of mankind into two, are rough, inadequate, and not very useful. But there is one division on which for my present purpose I desire to lay stress, though I

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would not have it accepted without qualifications ; it is between those who crave for clearness and intelligibility in their thoughts and views and those who care more to enlarge than to define their mental sphere, and are more ready to take in new and suggestive ideas than to arrange the old ones in consistent and methodical fashion. These two types of mind may be distinguished as the scientific and the poetical, and they ought to be mutually helpful, to lend to one another and borrow in return. In fact, to a certain extent they must do so. It is generally agreed that to make a really great discovery in science some exercise of the poetic imagination is required, to anticipate the result which will have to be painfully verified later ; and on the other hand a poet who has educated himself to marshal his ideas in order and to express them with accuracy and lucidity is superior to the hazy-minded seer of visions and dreamer of dreams. But be this as it may, it is in the realms of religious thought that the difference of type becomes most conspicuous, and is withal most necessary, in order that we should make continual advance as we attain to worthier conceptions of God and to a completer apprehension of the importance of human life and duty.

There are many possible points of conflict between the more aspiring and the more systematic thinker, but the one which I should like to take up now is the way in which each respectively would deal with religious symbolism, both in worship and in doctrine. Each may act as a check on the other, as the one would always try to soar beyond the plain prose expression of religious feeling or of religious truth, and, regarding bald intellectual statement as utterly inadequate, would have recourse to symbols which convey higher meanings

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than can be put into literal forms, while the other would often condemn as superstitious or extravagant any use of symbols beyond what is entirely necessary, and would insist, and very rightly, that the service of God should be reasonable.

I do not of course mean to imply that to cling to signs and symbols betokens a state of spiritual elevation, nor yet that tenacity of received dogmas necessarily goes with a pure love of truth. Just now I am considering symbolism and dogmatism in the ideal, and as essential elements in any religious system. Those whose temperament does not incline them to conform themselves exclusively to one type, and whose education enables them to discern what is good in both, should seek to award honour where honour is due, and to prevent any of the rich heritage which has come down to us from our fathers from being wasted through our own neglect.

It is not my intention then to enter into the arena of ancient controversy, but I think that it might conduce to clearer notions on the use and abuse of religious symbols if we dwelt for awhile on two important considerations: that both in religious worship and religious thought symbolism is absolutely necessary, and must hold a far larger place than is commonly recognised as belonging to it; and that for all who wish to hold for themselves, and to set forth for others, beliefs that may be relied on as true, and principles that will form a noble character, the right handling of symbols is no less important than the correct enunciation of abstract propositions in theology.

The most evident reason for the use of religious symbolism is the utter inadequacy of human language to express, simply and without figure, either our own thoughts and feelings with regard to the supersensual

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and divine, or the character of the divine as manifested to us. In a less degree, this deficiency of language leads to figures of speech in all discussion of what is abstract, since language must deal primarily with the sensible, and abstract terms have their origin in symbolism, though the origin is soon forgotten. Thus we all "talk poetry" instead of "talking prose without knowing it" whenever we denote any operations of our mind or movement of our affections. This does not necessarily imply vagueness and want of definite terms. Aspiration and inspiration are as easy to denote and to talk about as perspiration, though the latter has a plain, the former a symbolic meaning. Yet it is a well-known fact that it is much harder to be clear and accurate when we are dealing with what is intangible than it is when we are concerned with simple facts of outward experience. But when we come to what is most abstract as well as most intimate, when we would describe relations which are different from any which prevail in the world of sense and understanding, it is quite impossible to put away neatly our spiritual ideas in a cabinet made of earthly material. Language must furnish a framework for religious thought, as for all thought, but we must not hope to find a frame perfectly adapted to its contents.

If we consider the use of symbolism in religious worship we may be surprised to find how far it extends. Here, I may say, as throughout this discussion, I use the term in a wide sense, to comprehend generally all employment of signs by which anything visible or tangible stands for something else, whether the signification be allegorical, the result of associated ideas, or the outcome of tradition. In religious forms and ceremonies we commonly find an allegorical meaning invented to explain something which arose in quite

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another way. This method of explanation has gone out of vogue. There are not now many people, for example, who would give an allegorical explanation of the different parts of an elaborate church or the vestments of the clergy, when the real cause of these things may be found in structural necessity, or in the habits and fashions of olden time. But even artificially invented symbolism, so to speak, seems natural and quite in place when custom has led us to attach certain ideas and feelings to what originally had no connection with anything of the kind.

Now we find that many people who would like to reduce to a minimum all symbolism in words and acts, cannot really dispense with it. Every attitude and action, almost every verbal expression used in public worship has some significance beyond the natural manifestation of feeling and the utterance of plain statements or requests. The bodily attitude of the worshipper has varied according to the way in which he has conceived his relation to the object of worship. Kneeling seems to us a natural attitude, but it was not adopted in pre-Christian times, nor is it universal among Christians. It would assimilate our position with regard to the Most High to that of a subject approaching an Oriental monarch. The attitude in which the Greeks and Romans addressed their supplications to their divinities was erect. The uplifting of hands which has often accompanied prayer seems a survival of the offered gift which was a necessary accompaniment of any petition to a superior. True, the reverence which prompts us to take the usual attitude of prayer is a natural feeling, but the expression of that reverence is not entirely to be found in spontaneous emotion, just as we are told by historians of ceremony and ritual that

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many expressions of sorrow for the dead which come with apparent spontaneity to the bereaved are survivals of outworn beliefs and of old-world usage.

One advantage of symbols in religious worship is of a social kind. Many men and women of various tempers have been moved, and know that their forefathers have been moved, by the sight of some symbolic figure which does not mean exactly the same for all—which has in times past meant something yet more different for past generations, but which has never lost its potency. The cross was, doubtless, a religious symbol of some kind long before Christianity existed. But with Christianity it obtained a more solemn meaning. Yet the cross on which St. Paul was crucified with Christ, the sign by which Constantine conquered, the badge distributed to the eager mob of early crusaders, the monument at the foot of which John Bunyan saw Christian's burden roll off his back—surely this symbol ought not to be interpreted rigidly in one and only one sense. Or we might, if so great a subject did not require more laborious treatment, consider the wealth of meaning wrapped up in the Christian sacraments, both of which are doubtless in origin far older than the Christian Church and both of which, unless interpreted in a grossly materialistic way, are to be regarded as the “outward and visible sign” of that which is “inward and spiritual.” But if, in our jealousy for the spiritual, we were to discard sacraments and even formal acts of devotion other than the use of pious words, we should not get far in our expressions of prayer and praise without expressing our relations to God and our feelings towards Him in words of a highly symbolical kind. Whether, following the Hebrew psalmists, we address Him as our rock and our defence, as shepherd, as law-giver, as avenger, or whether

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we use the more tender epithets of mediæval hymnology it would surely be the most arrogant presumption to say that we are merely speaking good of what we know and asking for that which we require. Whatever we may mean, it is more than can be accurately set forth in the words we use. But if we agree that forms of worship must be symbolical in nature, it does not necessarily follow that the worshipper always is or ought to be conscious of the symbolism. Perhaps if he were too clearly conscious of it, during the act of worship, he would find the utterance of his feelings, clogged by his effort to understand them. To go back to the comparison already made, most abstract terms are originally figurative in meaning, but in using them we should lose the thread of our thought if we considered it our duty always to go back to the primitive meaning of our words. Nevertheless the study of our words helps to clear our thoughts, and the attention paid to the simplest meanings both of religious acts and of religious phraseology may be of use in encouraging or restraining the exuberance of religious emotion.

But, it may be said, if there is so much symbolism in *all* worship even of the simplest kind, is there any sense at all in the words and efforts of those who set themselves against excessive use of symbols? I am inclined to think that such people often have a good cause, but that it is really the quality rather than the quantity of the symbolism that is open to objections. Here, as everywhere, abuse goes side by side with use. Religious people who regard "types and symbols" as contrary to the spirit of Christianity are seeking to avert two dangers: lest the mechanical performance be substituted for an intelligent and sincere act of devotion, and lest we come to materialise our conceptions of what is purely spiritual. To take this second danger first: some of the

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best of the Greek philosophers and many Christians who followed along their lines to a considerable length,\* were fond of dwelling on the paradox that grotesque or evidently deficient symbols applied to the Divine Nature are less likely to mislead than those which seem more dignified, because the former cannot be taken literally, whereas the latter may be and often are, unless accompanied by sufficient instruction. "The Lord is a strong tower" does not materialise our conception of the Eternal. "The Lord is a man of war" may lead an ignorant person to think of Him as agitated by human passions. If, as often in our churches, the Holy Trinity is represented by a triangle, the symbol is at least innocent. But when in a French church I once saw carved on an altar an old man with a young one in his arms, I was shocked by the grossness of mind thereby displayed. If we compare the religion of the Jews with that of other nations of antiquity, we see the great superiority and elevation which went with the prohibition to form any similitude of the Godhead, though in verbal similitudes it was, as we have seen, unusually rich. Reverence and reticence may counteract the evils of superstition to a great extent, and it is better that people should think of God in the likeness of an old man or even in that of a consecrated wafer than that they should never think of Him at all. Perhaps the ignorant people who say prayers before hideous representations of the Sacred Heart or the Sacred Face believe in a hazy kind of way in a spiritual Being who is the real object of their worship. But one would like to give them less revolting symbols, if they were capable of appreciating such, or else to lead them from the symbols to what lies behind.

As to the notion that much symbolism makes worship

\* See Essay on "Dionysius the Areopagite."

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mechanical, we have here a general truth which we must be careful in applying to particular cases. Those who are unused to symbolic ceremonies find them a distraction, while those who are much accustomed to them would find a similar distraction in the lack of them, and that which to some people is a help to devotion may to others be a great hindrance. This applies to such things as incense. One Sunday, in Brittany, I was in a church where the pleasant custom prevailed of handing round baskets of blessed (not consecrated) bread—a survival, I suppose, of the *Agape*. It seemed to me a natural and simple sign of brotherhood. Whether the Breton peasants who partook of it felt more kindly towards one another in consequence, or whether they would have been more edified if they had been following the words of the service that was going on all the time, I am unable to say. But I feel that a large measure of Christian charity and of human sympathy are necessary in those who have to remove old symbols to which devotion has clung for ages, though the introduction of new symbols, however well devised, generally seems superfluous, and is often likely to do real harm.

In approaching the subject of symbolism in religious doctrine, I do not feel competent to do more than throw out a few hints, since an adequate treatment of the question would demand a deep thinker and a special student of theology. Hints, however, may be given by any one who has thought at all on these matters. We are not helped much by the old word *symbolum* for *creed*, since that stands, I believe, rather for the sign by which believers might know one another than for any hidden significance in the phrases used. But I think we may safely say that on a *primâ facie* view we should

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be inclined to state that religious formulæ must be more or less symbolic in character, owing to the limitations of our powers of thought and speech, and a little reflection on the nature of the chief doctrines of the Christian religion, or, I suppose, of any religion that *has* a body of doctrines, tends to confirm this impression.

Of course I am speaking only of doctrine in its religious character. Some people may think that statements as to historical fact or other discoverable and verifiable facts form part of our repertory of religious doctrines. Perhaps, however, if we looked a little deeper, we should find that it is not the actual facts, either of history or of science, that we learn in the form of religious doctrine, but rather the manner in which to interpret such facts when we have secured them. Of course our interpretation of the facts we know may dispose us to accept or to reject others. Our religious belief must in many ways affect our opinions on matters of history, but it does so in forming our tone of mind, not in imposing on us any particular acceptance of this or that categorical assertion as to what once took place.\* However this may be, we cannot take up any great doctrine of religion without seeing that it is and must be expressed in symbolic form.

Take, for instance, the first article of the Apostles' Creed. Whether we take it as indicating the relation in which we stand to the Eternal, or the relation which subsists between Him and Christ, we know that while it is dealing with hidden mysteries, it seeks to bring them home to us by comparing those relations to fatherhood and sonship. A great deal of meaning lies in the doctrine, one that must vary from generation to generation, since the relation of parents to children have been

\* See Essay on "Christianity as a Historical Religion."

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greatly modified in the progress of society. Still the main features of those relations are as permanent as human nature. The solemn declaration of the Creed sets the seal of authority to a symbolic manifestation of a truth clearly recognised in the Christian consciousness. The manifestation is not exhaustive but infinitely suggestive, fitter for meditation than for discussion.

Then again we may look at the doctrine which is accepted as the keystone of their religion by many to whom all symbols seem but stumbling-blocks—that of the Redemption of mankind by the life and death of Christ. If we take the word Redemption in its primary sense, as the release of a captive or debtor by the payment of a price for his deliverance, we see that to transfer the conception to its present place in the Christian religion is to make use of a great many figures of speech. And some of these figures cannot be pressed very far without bringing us into conflict with views which are held by all Christians. The travesty of the doctrine proclaimed by the narrowest and crudest type of Evangelicalism erred in that (to use a Coleridgean distinction) it took for a complete *analogy* what at best could only be an illustrative *metaphor*, and in so doing represented the Divine Nature as capable of vindictive desire for a victim and the whole of human obligation as an acquiescence in the substitution of an innocent sufferer for the guilty self. The error was more due to want of imagination than to religious or moral perversity. Symbolism may safely use illustrations borrowed from the law court as well as those which it takes from the garden, the pasture, the family, in all of which it will shadow forth the great and inexpressible facts of man's spiritual experience. But to take the forensic words and notions as if they were not symbolical, but indicative of plain

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fact, is to admit a more dangerous superstition than ever arose from overmuch regard for symbolic rites and institutions.

It may seem to some that if the forms of religious worship and of religious doctrine are to so large an extent symbolical, everything to do with religion must be vague and indefinite, that we have no criterion of truth and falsity, and that real differences become chiefly matters of taste. But to take this view is to misapprehend our position, and to confuse the truth to which our consciousness and that of our spiritual forefathers bears witness with the "earthen vessel" in which it must necessarily be enclosed. Perhaps a good deal of religious controversy which has raged round some apparently simple doctrine might be resolved into a difference concerning the adequacy or inadequacy of certain symbols, though I am not prepared to say that *all* religious controversy is of this nature. Even so, it is possible to feel as great a repugnance to superstition as engendering low religious ideas as we naturally cherish towards all kinds of untruth. In the regions in which I was staying as I wrote this paper the people seem to be very devout and much attached to their religion, which gives them principles by which to live and die in faith, hope, and charity. Yet many of the cults seem to me of a morbid tendency, and such as must more or less obscure the clearness of the spiritual vision with a film of sentimentalism. Chief among these is the honour paid to members of the Holy Family, who have hardly any existence save in fanciful tradition, especially St. Joseph and St. Anne. It may be said that in paying homage to those directly or indirectly connected with Christ by ties of kinship, these people were symbolically acknowledging the sacredness of

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family life. It seems to me, however, that there is something very unspiritual in laying so much stress on these family ties, an ineffectual effort to "know Christ after the flesh," which, in its literary and artistic expressions, shows an absence of any inspiring or helpful idea. Protestants are right in condemning these cults which have no foundation in Scripture, and the poverty of their fruit may justify that condemnation in the eyes of those who have not troubled themselves to dig around the root.

But a more serious, because a real moral, difficulty has to be met: if we speak of that which is spiritual, and especially of the attributes of the Divine Being, in terms which we frankly acknowledge to be symbolical, are we not in danger of separating our religious notions from our moral life? If, when we speak of God as a righteous judge, a loving father, an ever-present friend, we are only using more or less suitable symbols drawn from human relations, what ground have we for our faith? or again, how can our belief be reflected back so as to ennoble and purify those human relations whence the symbolism arose? Many people have entered into the spirit of generous indignation with which John Stuart Mill declared himself ready to suffer any torments rather than to characterise as *just* any being who did not possess the quality of justice such as we recognise it in man. This hard question can only be answered by extending the field of symbolism in another direction, by taking up that point of view from which all that is seen and temporal becomes an inadequate reflection of that which is unseen and eternal. To those who have attained that standpoint—towards which many are labouring, who can only see it from afar—the excellence of human goodness and the ordered beauty of the world

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are not transferred by the mind from their original earthly sphere to a higher and heavenly one, but rather derive all their loveliness and strength from the great Reality of which they are but partial manifestations. Belief in God to those who walk this earth carries with it implicitly a recognition of Divine power, wisdom, and love in all the fragmentary exhibitions of those qualities discovered by us in the noblest of our fellow-creatures. The communion with God which can be held through man and nature is none the less real for being symbolical.

“The sun, the moon, the stars, the seas, the hills and the plains  
Are not these, O Soul, the vision of Him who reigns?  
Is not the vision He, though He be not that which He seems?

Speak to Him, thou, for He hears, and spirit with spirit can  
meet.  
Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.”

VII

***PROFESSOR SEELEY AS A MORAL AND  
RELIGIOUS TEACHER***



## VII

### PROFESSOR SEELEY AS A MORAL AND RELIGIOUS TEACHER

(READ A FEW WEEKS AFTER HIS DEATH)\*

IT has been often and very truly said that no great man can be adequately appreciated till several years after his death; that his relations to his predecessors and his contemporaries ought to be seen in perspective before we can discern clearly what they are; that his most conspicuous traits of character are often those least worth notice, and his most immediately impressive works the soonest forgotten. Yet, in spite of this, there are *some* things which we realise most forcibly with regard to our great ones in those moments when we begin to miss the familiar figure in our ordinary walk or the expected utterances on passing subjects. The withdrawal of their bodily presence, their removal hence into the unknown world, must ever stimulate our powers of memory and quicken our feelings of what he who has gone has been, not only to the world at large, but to us

\* It has seemed better to leave this essay as it was first written. Any attempt to recast it would have taken away its character as a record of first impressions, without acquiring the weight of a deliberate and critical estimate. It may be added that those to whom the paper was read knew of the Professor as an early and faithful friend of their College.

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personally, whether his personal influence was exerted on us by social intercourse or by the equally personal power of public speech and writing. And this personal appreciation is necessary to prepare us for the higher and more critical estimate that should come later :—

“ . . . now thy brows are cold,  
I see thee what thou art, and know  
Thy likeness to the wise below,  
Thy kindred with the great of old.”

Apart from the thought of our profit, a sense of gratitude to the dead seems almost to demand a quiet and reverent consideration of his character and influence on the part of all who can realise the duty of gratitude at all. It is for this reason that I feel it, in a sense, incumbent on me to ask you to give a few thoughts to-day to the recent memory of one whom most of us have learned to admire and revere.

Having mentioned, however, the *personal* aspect as of importance here, I am bound to add that of personal intercourse with the late Professor, as commonly understood, I have had practically none. Many in this room have had far more opportunities of conversation with him than I have ever had. Yet in a wider sense I can say that I have long lived within the range of his influence, and know how powerful it has been. For years, during my student days here, I went eagerly to his lectures, whatever might be the subject he announced, and always came away with a feeling of mental stimulus, accompanied sometimes, perhaps, with a rebellious opposition to some view which he had been propounding—an opposition not unwholesome in itself, and likely soon to tone down into a critical semi-acceptance of the rejected doctrine. But long before that time I had felt the magician's wand. I am old enough to remember

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the agitation caused in certain somewhat stagnant regions of the religious world when "Ecce Homo" was first launched forth; the eager questionings it aroused in minds to which the teaching of that book came as a novelty, though much of its contents would probably now be taken by them as matter of course. To those who had read and meditated on that book, and had also followed the main lines of the author's thoughts in matters historical and moral as lucidly set forth in his lectures, the publication of a book by him or any lesser utterance on any important subject was anxiously awaited, and his point of view readily seized. And, as I have taken permission at this point—and at no other—to speak of personal experiences, I would add that with me, as probably with many others, the strength of the influence exerted has been felt in the way that gives the surest test. I have found, in looking lately through some of both his more serious and his fugitive works, the expression of thoughts that I had so thoroughly assimilated as not to remember that they were originally his. Many of us, probably, at Cambridge, owe to him a great part of our mental furniture, yet his teaching was so stimulating to independent thought and, as I have said, so provocative of resistance, that I do not think it can ever have had too overmastering a power over those who heard his lectures or read his books.

I do not intend to say anything here of his specially historical work, except in so far as it touches his views as to morals and religion. This exception, some might say, is a very wide one. It is, however, plain to all who have studied his peculiar mind and thoughts, that most of the comparisons of him with other historians made during the last fortnight in the newspapers are entirely misleading. His one purely historical work, the "Life

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of Stein," however laborious it may be, is not the greatest monument of his genius. Yet in all his works of a professedly non-historical kind, the essentially historical character of his mind and his whole view of life appear. In one\* of the more appreciative of the notices that have appeared, great praise has been bestowed upon him for *not* accomplishing the work of a great historian: "He had before his eyes the fear of Macaulay and other competitors with the novelists; and, rightly or wrongly, it seemed to him necessary to avoid wholly such a perilous treatment of history—such a sacrifice of the highest and most important objects to colour and picturesqueness." If the "peril" existed it was, I think, entirely chimerical. More than one mode is legitimate in treating historical subjects. Macaulay has his rightful place, and there was no particular call to Seeley to renounce his own splendid style in his largest,† if not his greatest work. Strange to say, his anxiety on behalf of historical truth did not prevent him from desiring that moral and religious teachers should drive their lessons home by application of modern rather than solely of biblical history.‡ "The clergy," he says, "should draw largely upon English history and biography for illustrations of their moral teaching. . . . However many mistakes might be made in the estimate of character, however many false idols set up, however much exaggerated declamation delivered, however often the truth of history might be warped to gain a moral, the continual application of a large number of minds to the sifting of our history for the purpose of preserving in memory whatever in it was memorable would, I believe, result in nothing less than this . . .

\* In the *Cambridge Review* by Mr. Hales.

† "Life of Stein."

‡ "Lectures and Essays," p. 232-3.

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there would spring up an idealised history, which would become familiar to every imagination, and give a new sureness and continuousness to the progress of the national mind, and a new elevation to national character."

I quote this passage to show that the self-restraint for which his reviewer praises him is no pedantic exclusiveness in regard to his own subject. If he loved historical accuracy much, he loved historical morality (if I may so call it) still more. I have indeed been inclined to think that he occasionally erred in opening up vistas of wide generalisation to minds insufficiently equipped with accurate knowledge of facts. The self-restraint which he practised and which seems to me worthy of far higher praise than that due to his suspicious dislike of the dramatic element in history, is seen in the limits he imposed on himself with regard to the amount that he gave to the world, and the exquisite finish which we admire in all his essays and comparatively short books. "In all the professions," he writes, "a man's first duty now is to renounce the ambition of being distinguished for activity; the temptation chiefly to be avoided is that of undertaking more work than he can do in first-rate style. The quality of work must be improved, and for that end, if necessary, the quantity reduced. A higher and calmer sort of activity must be arrived at: economy in energy, expenditure without waste, zeal without haste." \* To these principles he was faithful. Even if his unpublished papers and unfinished book † should ever see the light, we shall be able to have all his writings on one small shelf of our book-case. And

\* "Lectures and Essays," p. 232-3.

† "Introduction to Political Science." Since edited by the late Professor H. Sidgwick.

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to that shelf we shall resort in all moods without fear of being wearied, or nauseated, or fed with empty air. In these days in which violent verbosity so often passes for energy, and transparent clearness is commonly associated with superficiality, it is a comfort to turn to one man at least who could write on the profoundest subjects and state the results of the most subtle and arduous thought in a style which gives no excuse for misunderstanding, nor suggests any contempt for the audience to whom he is trying to make his meaning clear.

But to come to the main characteristics of his teaching in religion and morals: his attitude is, in many ways, peculiar to himself. He was not a systematiser, but a luminous thinker, who turned his lamp on this or that and never without bringing fresh points into prominence. Of course I do not mean that he *had* no general view as to the universal scheme of things; every man who thinks hard for fifty or sixty years is likely to have attained a mental cosmos of his own. But Seeley's task was not to give a system but to stimulate and direct thought, both in speculative and in practical directions. And this he seemed frequently to do by the propounding of paradoxes, one might almost say by taking up a paradoxical position in most of the subjects he dealt with.

I do not, of course, wish to charge him with any vulgar delight in the startling and sensational. Paradox with him, though used with art, was the natural fruit of a singularly independent and original mind. He was able to seize on one particular aspect of a thing and set it forth in quite new relations to everything else. He never seems to have aimed at setting forth the whole truth, as he held it, about any great subject. Hence the fascination and the stimulus felt by those who

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followed his guiding hand while wondering all the while what his unrevealed inmost mind must be. A halo of paradox seemed, as it were, to surround his form as viewed from below. His view of the relation of history to religion, just touched on, contains more than one suggestive paradox. To him the real "evidences of Christianity" were entirely historical. It is in virtue of our constituting an integral part in the continuous stream of historical Christianity that he considers us entitled still to call ourselves Christians. Yet on the other hand he is so indifferent to the acceptance or rejection of certain views as to even important details of Christian origins and religious history, that it seems to him as absurd for men to separate from the Church in virtue of historic doubts, as it would be for them to give up appointments in the State on the ground that they doubted the stories of Hengist and Horsa.\* A yet more remarkable paradox appears in the characters which he simultaneously bore of a scholarly, calm, retiring genius and of an unsurpassed prophet and preacher of enthusiasm, of pure, exalted feeling, of active philanthropy. There is also something of a paradoxical tone about both his books on religion, due to the elimination of certain elements which are generally present in the discussion of the subjects he is treating. In "Ecce Homo" he examines, as historical investigator, the objects and methods of Christ regarded as a historical character. Most of those who have read the book will acknowledge that, whether or no they entirely accept all the author's views, it has shed much fresh light on their previous thoughts and knowledge and has brought into strong relief many half-discerned truths. But there is nothing in that book of what the Germans call "Chris-

\* See essay in this book on "Christianity as an Historical Religion."

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tologie," no analysis of the conception of Christ which has been held in successive ages. The writer does not imply—in some of his other works he expressly denies—that Jesus, the historical man, is to be regarded as in all respects identical with the Christ of the Church. Yet he finds it possible for the time to separate these notions, and because the separation is possible, his work, if partial, is a completed, harmonious whole. The modern study we feel most inclined to compare with it is Renan's "Vie de Jésus," but however much we may appreciate the amiable, sensitive, and often profoundly wise spirit of the brilliant Frenchman, we must acknowledge that the greater seriousness of the Englishman stands him in good stead, as it enables him to grasp the sterner sides of Christ's character and teaching. In "Natural Religion" an attempt is made to separate, for the time, Religion in its essence from all these adjuncts of most religious systems which constitute a supernatural element: the supposition of a personal God, with whom communion may be held, of miraculous interventions with the order of nature, of a future life which may compensate for the evils of the present. And he does seem to show that men and peoples may, in a certain stage at least of their development, reject the supernatural yet retain a very real, practical, and socially constructive religion, based on a reverent admiration for the order of the Universe, with a love of all that is noble in human kind, or it may be on an intense feeling for the beautiful in nature and art. Our difficulty here, however, is that the separation cannot be effected as in the previous case; that if, with the Professor, we make *Nature* to include all human beings, taking in, I suppose, ourselves with all our experience, powers, and aspirations, we can hardly contemplate it in a religious

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attitude without bringing in something that is at least borrowed from supernaturalism. When we see it laid down that men of science, unless they are specialist pedants, are sternly theistic in their religion, when the Psalms which set forth the power of the Almighty shown in His works are said to be consonant with the tone of scientific nature-worship, when we hear suggestions of a modernising of the Bible by reading "Nature" for "God" and "Humanity" for "Christ," we seem indeed to be launched into a sea of paradox. Yet we may be thankful even for the paradox, if it brings home to us the truths that "Natural Religion" is presupposed in all religion worth the name, and that the only real Atheism consists in Titanic wilful resistance to the Eternal Order, in small-minded, cautious shrinking from all great thoughts, or in cynic indifference to the conflicting and distracting principles held by those around us. But a further drawback lies in the unsatisfactory character of Natural Religion as acknowledged by him even when he is making out a case for it. He writes, "I can conceive no religion as satisfactory that falls short of Christianity." \* In language which reminds us of Mr. Balfour's, he shows how the contemplation of Nature alone may incline us to pessimism, and when he adds, "if religion (*i.e.*, Natural Religion) fails us, it is only when human life is proved to be worthless," † this is not an entirely consoling answer, since to very many people in our days life *does* seem little better than worthless. The value of the whole book seems to me to lie more in the thoughts incidentally expressed by the way, than in the working out of the whole conception.

Taking now these two books, with some of his

\* "Natural Religion," p. 25. † "Natural Religion," p. 262.

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published essays, I would draw attention to some of his utterances with regard to the three main subjects to which he would ever and anon recur: the necessity, to any kind of religion or of healthful social life, of enthusiastic devotion, of high ideals, and of moral warmth; the need of instructing people with regard to the ideals they should aim at and the laws under which they must live; and the possibility, in our progress intellectual and moral, of avoiding any violent breach with the past and of continuing to drink of the spiritual streams that slaked the thirst of our forefathers.

I. I need hardly quote any passages to show how all-important a generous devotion to high ideals is made in everything that Seeley ever wrote, yet some of them are so noble in tone and so perfect in expression that I cannot refrain from doing so. In speaking of the phrase "baptize with fire" he says: "Baptism means cleansing and fire means warmth. How can warmth cleanse? The answer is that moral warmth does cleanse. No heart is pure that is not passionate, no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic."\* Again "The Apostles regard it as possible to *grieve* the Divinity who resided within them, and even to *quench* His influence. But neither they nor Christ even for a moment supposed that, if He should take his flight, it is possible to do without Him, or that the sphere of Christian duty should be narrowed to suit the lukewarmness of Christian feeling. Christianity is an enthusiasm or it is nothing."† The one essential character of religion lies, for him, in worship, in habitual admiration. The great enemy to real religion is the conventionality which is opposed to all fresh inspiration. The power of Christianity at first lay in entire devotion to a character

\* "Ecce Homo," p. 7.

† Ibid., p. 242.

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regarded with boundless admiration. This view is not hostile to that in which Christianity is compared with other religions of humanity: "All virtue which is genuine and vital springs out of the worship of man in some form. Wherever the Higher Morality shows itself, Humanity is worshipped. It is worshipped under the form of country, or of ancestors, or of heroes, or of great men, or saints or virgins, or in individual lives, under the form of a friend, or mother, or wife, or any object of admiration, who, once seizing the heart, make all humanity seem sacred, and turn all dealings with men into a religious service. It is worshipped most of all when, passing by an act of faith beyond all that we can know, we attribute all the perfections of ideal humanity to the Power that made and sustains the universe." \*

This last passage seems to me a very suggestive and far-reaching one, but I must pass on. First, however, I may mention that the phrase "enthusiasm of humanity," which sums up the conception, in "Ecce Homo," of the new force brought by Christianity into our social system, seems somewhat hackneyed to those who are accustomed to hear it from the pulpit or encounter it in second-rate books, but came with much force and freshness to us when it was first coined.† No notion can be more alien to the mode of thought which prevails in all Seeley's writings than the identification either of Christianity or of the higher morality with a soft, easy-going altruism that begins and ends in human kindness. Among his utterances to the contrary I need only quote one: "If men can add once more the Christian confidence to the

\* "Natural Religion," pp. 167-8.

† It was *not* coined by Seeley, yet he may have the credit of making it current coin.

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Hebraic awe, the Christianity that will result will be of the far higher kind than that which passes too often for Christianity now, which, so far from being love added to fear, and casting out fear, is a presumptuous and effeminate love that never knew fear." \*

II. Believing thus in the necessity of high ideals, Seeley often laments the want of ideals in great part of our modern life, notably in modern education. Parents and teachers have commonly, he complains, no idea before them as to the result they expect in the education they give to their children. Nor, if we have ideals, have we much notion how we ought to set about attaining them. For Seeley, in all his utterances about enthusiasm, never supposed that it could supersede the necessity of moral education. Yet "the people of England are not taught morality at all;" "by the teaching of morality I do not mean the teaching that we ought to be moral, but the teaching what is moral and what is not." † The task of imparting such teaching he would give mainly to a properly trained body of clergy. He felt sympathy with the attempt to stir a more general interest in ethical subjects, but it seemed to him that the treatment of such subjects should never be separated from that of religion, and, in a Christian country, of Christianity. His thoughts on the subject were clearly and forcibly expressed in a paper he read to the Cambridge Ethical Society soon after its inauguration.

III. This brings us to the third of his continual topics, one, however, more suggested than actually expressed—that even the most advanced thought need not lead this generation to break with the past. I may seem to be placing him here in the rank of Christian apologists, or

\* "Natural Religion," p. 111.

† "Lectures and Essays," p. 247.

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of reconcilers of Religion and Science, but this would not be fair to him, as he never seems to suppose that Christianity needs any apology nor Religion and Science any reconciliation.

He is, of course, in favour of entire freedom of thought and of readiness to accept new light from all quarters. And he saw what this involved. "There is no middle course in education between the antiquarianism that secures the mind from the intrusion of disturbing thoughts and the modernism which deals with them unreservedly and exhaustively. We must turn our backs or our faces upon the questions of the day. There is nothing but disquiet and danger to be reaped from looking at them sideways."\* Yet with all sympathy for scientific and social progress there seemed to his mind, at once historical and deeply reverent, no difficulty in clinging to our ancient faith and working by means of time-honoured institutions. He differs from the ordinary religious apologists in several ways. He does not merely allow some limited scope to science and secularism, but would, in a sense, draw all science with all culture into religion, and abolish secularism altogether. He uses without restraint the language of Hebrew prophets against the conventional self-righteous men of their day to denounce the very similar character of the religious public at the present time. He believes in and proclaims the antithesis of the Church and the World—as he understands the terms—with all the vigour of a hermit or a Puritan, and we feel that his distinction is radically the same as theirs. To him the era of inspiration is not closed, the Bible of every nation is still being written, the prophecies and promises of old are as freely to be reinterpreted by us as they have

\* "Lectures and Essays," p. 254.

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been by the successive ages of man since they were first uttered. Again, religion is not to be propped up and fenced round, or tolerated for the sake of old associations or present usefulness in restraining the vulgar. It needs to be, he often says, something robust, active, constructive, not a mere solace to the weary or an occupation for women and children. Here again we see the difference between him and Renan, who, in his inherited tenderness for Catholic Christianity, speaks of lingering over the sweetness of an empty urn which has once held roses. It would be hard to find anything less substantial to which he could compare that force which of old has moulded nations into organic life and raised up noble characters in the darkest regions. Religion, to Seeley, should be as comprehensive as it should be robust. He had something of the impatience of a Scotch Covenanter against making religion to consist of "mere morality." As to existing institutions, he is naturally in favour of Church reform, but would rather increase than diminish the functions of the clergy, and believes in the helpfulness to men at the present day of Sunday observance, of the Sacraments, even of the possible revival of pulpit power. He advocates in one of his essays\* (I believe an early one) a possible body of clergy of the kind desired by Milton, "a muster of all the piety, genius, and ability of the country, relieved from all tests save tests of character and competence, and set in charge of the religious and moral guidance of the nation."

This robust religion, which should be the religion of the future, "does not brood over a future life, but is intensely occupied with the present; it does not surmise something behind Nature, but contemplates Nature

\* P. 117

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itself; it does not worship a Power which suspends natural laws, but the power which is exhibited in these laws; it does not shrink from political organisation, but is itself the soul of all healthy political organisation; it does not damp enjoyment, but is itself the principle of all rich enjoyment; it is not self-conscious or self-absorbed, and does not render us anxious about our own fate, but is the principle which destroys self and gives us strength to rise above personal anxieties."\* Not that this type of religion is to be regarded as perfect. Some supernatural element over and above it he would admit into the inner sanctuary of the soul. But the last point I want to notice is that, according to his view, some even of the most consoling of beliefs need to be kept in restraint. This applies especially to the belief in a future life, one of those which should ever form a glorious background, not to be forced into the foreground of religious thought and feeling. From indications in the "Life of Stein," in "Ecce Homo," and elsewhere, it seems to me that the immortality of the individual soul was a doctrine on which Seeley would have liked to dwell, but he rightly saw that life and duty have claims on us which do not allow us to "brood over a future life," though we cannot dwell too much in thought on the essential parts of our religion, nor worship too much the Object to which it points us.

But beyond and above all that Seeley taught, in books or orally, he has impressed us with one fact we do well to learn afresh—the dignity of the contemplative life. It was by intensity of thought, devotion to the student's ideal, patient industry in learning from all sources and never shrinking from the hardest problems, that he acquired a power stronger than that of many who have

\* "Natural Religion," p. 259.

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given some time to thought, but paid more attention to practical life. It is not to every one, as to him, that from youth upwards a categorical imperative speaks : Thou shalt think. Yet the duty of thought is one that many would acknowledge if they had the courage to face it. Few indeed could practise such self-control as to pursue a thinker's life in the presence of intense suffering, lingering illness, the prospect of a painful death. We all know his readiness to help and instruct others. But if he had done nothing but receive and mature, with all the energy of his mental and moral nature, the thoughts of his highly gifted mind, and turn some of them out in such form that we could receive and assimilate them, he would still have accomplished a noble task. We often need nowadays, amid the superabundance of works on the deepest subjects by those who have never had time to study them, to realise in our minds how rich the harvest would be if all the seed sown were allowed to rise and to grow without haste and without rest.

To think more quietly and more deeply ; to worship more devoutly and more constantly ; to have regard to truths which lie below all controversies, and may even inspire clashing enthusiasms ; to dwell on truisms without impatience, and examine paradoxes without alarm ; to realise ever that we are a part of the great community through which the Eternal has worked for ages, and have our share in the spiritual privileges and solemn duties which belong to all members of that community—these were a part of the message he had for those of his generation. How he delivered it the critical mind may examine hereafter. In the presence of his grave we can but accept it and be thankful.

**VIII**

***RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS:  
HOW FAR MUST IT BE DENOMINATIONAL***



## VIII

### RELIGIOUS INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOLS: HOW FAR MUST IT BE DENOMINATIONAL?

#### INTRODUCTION TO A DISCUSSION

IT is a great misfortune, both for religion and for education among us, that the question stated above is hardly ever approached without some measure of sectarian or anti-sectarian bitterness in the inquirers. Question-begging epithets are even now launched forth on both sides; teaching is dogmatic, unpractical, narrowing, perhaps sacerdotal; or it is uncertain, back-boneless, a temporary compromise between religion and irreligion. Yet the advocates of denominational and of undenominational education have each a good cause. My object just now is not to examine wherein the goodness of each cause consists,\* but to consider into which part of religious education a denominational element is most likely to be introduced.

One preliminary remark may be made. In saying what is to be said for undenominational education we do not in the least imply that such education is best given by those who stand outside the Churches, since at the present day most people who feel the strongest

\* See essay on "Man's Responsibility for his Beliefs."

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interest in religious subjects, and are, therefore, *cæteris paribus*, likely to prove the best teachers, do belong to some particular Church or denomination. Of course, if they are imperfectly educated they *may* think it impossible to teach anything to do with religion except as it is held within the pale of their own Church. But there ought to be a sufficient supply of teachers who are not so *bornés*.

On thinking over the kinds of religious teaching simultaneously given to children at school, I have divided it under three heads: (1) that given in short religious services; (2) the Bible lesson; (3) practical lessons on faith and duty.

Let us take each in order.

1. The short school service is a great benefit to the school if conducted with reverence, simplicity, and cheerfulness. Of course the practice of religious worship in a school cannot be looked at wholly in an educational aspect; if it were it would lose all worth in that aspect and in every other. But its value on that side is manifest. Independently of what is actually taught thereby, children are led to the formation of habits which may keep by some of them all their life, are trained to regard each act of life as performed in the presence of God and in the strength which He gives, and thus fitly preceded by an act of dedication. In order that such a service should be really helpful, the passages of Scripture should be carefully chosen—short, clear, hortatory—the hymns and collects should contain no expressions of over-strained or non-natural feeling. Thus, *e.g.*, expressions of the wickedness of the world, and a desire to depart from it, are unreal in the mouths of young people, even if sung to a rollicking tune.

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Now in this part of school religion, denominational questions need not be intrusive. Almost all Dissenters approve the use of the Church of England collects ; and, in a general sense, the recognition of the Christian year. The hymns in most collections are the work as much of Dissenters as of Church-people ; and the Bible is no possession of any party.

2. The Bible lesson should be made as thorough a piece of work as any other lesson. The teacher should work up the history and literature of the subject at least as carefully as is done for lessons of history and literature, and he will have abundant help in books of the learned of all denominations and of none. His object in this class is not so much to teach religion as to give an intelligent and intimate knowledge of the books on which religious teaching, among us, is primarily based. The chief difficulty is that the views on inspiration held by some parents may lead them to regard with suspicion any interpretations which conflict with theories of verbal infallibility. Here, then, the teacher may have to advance with some caution, but if he has a reverent spirit and also a fair acquaintance with the views of the more conservative of biblical critics, he may avoid pitfalls, and, at the same time, may lead the young people to results which they will not have to unlearn by and bye. For the sake of truth and sincerity it is above all necessary that these results should never prove incongruous with what the children are learning in the other fields of history, literature, and science.

Here again, so far as the Bible itself is the object of study, the denominational element may well be kept aloof. Sound learning, along with imaginative sympathy (which, after all, is necessary to the understanding of any good book) is all that one requires in the teacher.

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I ought, perhaps, under this head to include the teaching of doctrinal formulæ which are held to be legitimate deductions from Scripture. Most people who have had to do with young children consider that it is useless, and even pernicious, to try to make them grasp the dogmas of theology, though many believe in the great usefulness of teaching forms of words which are not comprehended at the time, but which may, if stamped into the mind in childhood, assert some power over the thoughts in later life. Those who take this latter view are bound to give adhesion to some denominational teaching, since we can hardly say that the most widely accepted of formulæ is held by *all* religious people, or even by *all* Christians in our day. It seems to me that familiarity with the chief creeds of Christendom is a necessary part of a liberal education, such as even cultivated agnostics would probably desire for their children. Of course it makes a difference whether such creeds are taught as authoritative or as historical and literary productions. If, however, the ground is taken that the doctrine taught is based on Scripture, the catechetical lesson, if there is any, will be subordinate to the Bible teaching. As to rival systems of Church government, children must learn that they exist, but the school should no more become a nursery for Episcopalians, Presbyterians, or Congregationalists, than it should aim at making children staunch Liberals or Conservatives.

3. The two above kinds of religious instruction might be considered sufficient. But there is a danger lest the service should become a matter of course and the Bible lesson a thing apart from daily life. The religious principles laid down in the books of the Bible which are studied and in the prayers and hymns which are said and sung, need to be consciously applied to

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every day life, not only as the basis of a code of duty, but as a source of inspiration and spiritual strength.

However, it is here, as everywhere, better for young people to learn themselves to apply what they learn, rather than to have all the bearings of everything that they are taught worked out for them. In three cases we may say that a third branch of religious instruction is superfluous. (a) Where good and instructive sermons are preached in the church which the children attend. But schoolmistresses know, alas! that not much confidence can be placed on this kind of help. (b) Where the parents themselves give habitual instruction to their children. This again is not to be relied on. Nor does it supply what is needed in a boarding-school. (c) When the teacher or teachers are able, quite simply and naturally, to fall back on first principles with regard to every case for practical decision as it comes up. But this again is rarely found to be the case.

It seems to me that for this third kind of religious instruction some recognition of denominational differences may be desirable. In one sense this teaching needs to be broader than any other. Modern education is singularly lacking in clearness of view as to the fundamental ideas of morality; and instruction in morals, especially in relation to Christian obligations and motives, might be given in brief addresses with friendly talk in small classes. But the forms in which duty and the helps to duty are recognised differ more or less with the religious conceptions prevalent in one or another Church or sect. Thus, the duty of self-knowledge and of self-examination should be inculcated on all but quite little children. But perhaps it should be taught in rather a different way to girls who have been confirmed and go periodically to Holy Communion and to others.

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Again, a teacher who would appeal to young people by recalling their baptismal vow can only do so with those whose baptism has been of the Catholic or Anglican form. On the other hand, courage, independence, and readiness to suffer for a private religious conviction are stimulated by reference to noble-minded ancestors, and they ought to be, far more than they are, the heritage of all children of the Puritans. Here, I should say, the teaching is not denominational, but account is taken of differences in denomination.

I am inclined, then, to think that this third—the applied side of religious instruction—can best be given—  
(a) by addresses to all on points of practical duty ;  
(b) by classes not too large for conversation on special points of practical duty and religious privileges, the classes generally being made up of girls who live in the same religious atmosphere ; and (c) by opportunities of *private* talk on the part of every girl who wishes it with some teacher who can at least understand her religious position, and who is anxious neither to proselytise her nor to shut her off from any means of help that would be available for her.

My experiences are rather those of a learner than of a teacher. I know by experience that a Christian as distinct from Church or Protestant Bible-teaching may be given. But I doubt whether it could ever be given unless the teacher had more or less a free hand. It must needs suffer considerably if the captious criticism of a committee, or the want of confidence on the part of the parents, force her to steer carefully between the Scylla and Charybdis of sectarianism and secularism, instead of freely spreading her sails to the favouring breeze.

**IX**

***HATRED AND CHARITY***



## IX

### HATRED AND CHARITY

**A**RE feelings of strong and bitter hatred compatible with a state of Christian charity? To ask this question seems like inquiring whether fire can burn under water, or storms rage on a tranquil lake. Hatred is on all hands recognised as an anti-Christian passion, to be classed with "envy, malice, and all uncharitableness." "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer," says St. John, and a yet higher Authority says: "Every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the judgment. . . . Resist not him that is evil. . . . Love your enemies." Christians generally profess to acknowledge the binding power of these dicta. Yet, in point of fact, we do all resist evil men, we are most of us often angry with our brethren, those of us who have enemies do not, in ordinary speech, profess to love them; and, what is more significant, we do not generally regard the capacity of feeling indignation, or even hatred, as a thing to be ashamed of in ourselves or reprobated in our neighbours. In fact, we most of us feel more respect for any man or woman if we learn that he or she is capable of being a "good hater," and we regard advocates of non-resistance as pusillanimous if they are

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following the dictates of their own feelings, as fanatical if they are impelled by conviction.

Now this inconsistency, not only between theory and practice, but also between theory accepted and theory simultaneously rejected by the same persons under varying circumstances, forms part of a large question which forces itself on every observant and pondering mind. It has been remarked, by an eminent critic, that the great difference between ancient and modern education—especially in relation to morals—lies in the homogeneity which once prevailed, and which is now so strangely absent. For us a certain code of morals is set up in the nursery, another in the schoolroom, another in commerce, yet another in fashionable society, and again a far different one in Church. In comparatively simple societies, where the prevalent notions of morals and religion have been part of the national and social growth, not imposed by any external authority, either human or Divine, such discrepancies are not likely to occur. It would take us far afield if I were to consider either the causes or the effects for good and evil of this strange complexity in our ethical standard. Briefly we may say that *morally* it has often worked for evil, since it has again and again afforded a city of refuge to those fleeing from the inner penalties of transgressions against a formally recognised law; but also at times for good, in that it has hindered the growth of that spirit of self-satisfaction which says of the Commandments: “*All these have I kept from my youth up.*” But *intellectually* such discord must be undesirable, and it presents a harassing problem to all who require some reasonable justification for the moral principles they accept. For they have so to reconcile the contradictions which beset them as to clear their

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own path of duty, and to explain in some measure the moral progress and fluctuations of mankind.

On this great question, then, we do well to meditate long and deeply. There must be some explanation of the fact that the standard set up in the Sermon on the Mount and in some of the Epistles of St. Paul has hardly ever been seriously aimed at, even by men imbued with a large measure of the Christian spirit. It is sufficiently evident that the great champions of Christianity—of genuine working Christianity, I mean, not of any spurious forms—have hardly in any age seemed good examples of the beatitudes; that they have in many cases ignored in their conjugal relations the clear precepts given by Christ, and in still more cases have thrown to the winds those maxims against the accumulation of wealth and the opposition of force by force which stand clearly enough in spite of the weakening expletives which have sometimes forced their way into the text itself. Of course those who acknowledge the authority of the Gospel teaching, when confronted with these facts, are ready with some justification for themselves and their fellows, sometimes sincere and made in good faith, often of a kind to which we may, without harshness, apply the term *shuffling*.

The justification, or explanation, usually takes one of three forms. The first, used chiefly by people of illogical mind, and generally by those suffering from mental and moral timidity, is that the injunctions of our Lord and His Apostles are in many cases to be interpreted "figuratively," that is, when you press them for an explanation of the words, that they are purposely pitched in an unnaturally high key, with the object of inducing poor human nature to try for the impossible and attain the highest possible to its limited faculties.

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“Oriental hyperbole” is a characteristic of some biblical descriptions and narratives; may not the impractically high pitch of Gospel morals be attributed to the same quality? Now the chief objections to this answer—or excuse—lie in the extremely simple and precise way in which the commandments of the New Law are opposed to what was “said to them of old time”; and also in the fact already pointed out, that with regard to some, at least, of the Gospel precepts, our difficulty lies not in the superior height of the morality they embody, but in its essential difference from that acknowledged by Christians, and even from that practised by our Lord Himself and His immediate followers. It were indeed an unworthy thought that Christ should have acted as a writing-master, who makes his pupils follow a copy-book model that he and they alike despise, with the purpose of discarding it when their hands are firmer and more deft.

The second explanation is one that would regard the New Law not as proclaimed to the multitude at the foot of the mountain, but as taught privately to the inner circle of the disciples that had climbed to the summit where their Master sat. Whether or not the teaching of Christ had an exoteric and an esoteric side is a question not to be answered without much consideration. It seems to me that some such supposition is necessary to account for much that is otherwise quite inexplicable in the Gospels. But that hypothesis will not, of itself, solve our difficulty with regard to anger and hatred, since, as just noticed, some members of the inner circle not only felt, but approved, on occasions, a very real anger, and something much like hatred, and one kind of righteous and stern anger is more than once attributed to our Lord Himself.

The third explanation is that some parts of the New

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Morality embody principles capable of reinterpretation with changing times and circumstances; that even those who do not follow them literally may discern in them laws of binding power for all who are able to apprehend them; that without weakening them we may interpret them in accordance—not, indeed, with the practice or principles of ordinary social life, but with the highest ideals which we are capable of conceiving, and with the strictest rules of conduct to which we are bound by an enlightened conscience.

Confining ourselves, then, henceforth, to the laws of Christian morals in relation to this one particular subject, let us consider a little the position of anger and hatred in the code of morals that has commended itself to the highest Christian consciousness, and inquire what kinds of inimical feeling are necessary, or at least permissible to us, and what kinds are to be utterly condemned. When I speak of anger and of hatred in the same breath, I may seem to be confusing two distinct things. I think, however, that they are of a sufficiently similar character to admit of their being treated together. Anger is a passion or emotion which comes and goes. Hatred is a fixed disposition or attitude of mind and feelings with regard to some object, generally a personal object. We may be angry with those we do not hate, but the presentation to us of what we hate must move us to anger. At the same time the capacity of feeling anger carries with it the possibility of hatred, felt either against the object of our anger or against his conduct and the world which incites or permits it. Momentary anger is less under our control than is a settled disposition of hatred. But anger habitually indulged is certain to lead to hatred, and if the tendency to hatred is consciously suppressed, the process involves a mitigation of the feelings of anger.

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Now there is one kind of anger, often leading to an abiding hatred, which all men naturally approve, that which we call *righteous indignation*. This signifies to us an abhorrence of everything false, cruel, or base. The need of a counter-enthusiasm against evil in those who would feel a positive enthusiasm for what is good has been perceived and eloquently set forth by some of our greatest thinkers and writers, notably by the author of "Ecce Homo" in his fine chapter on the "Law of Resentment," and by Cardinal Newman in his verses on "Zeal and Love," part of which I will quote :—

" And wouldst thou reach, rash scholar mine,  
Love's high, unruffled state?  
Awake! Thy easy dreams resign,  
First learn thee how to hate.

Hatred of sin, and zeal, and fear  
Lead up the holy hill,  
Track them, till charity appear  
A self-denial still."

Some may say, however, that the words "of sin" after "hatred" destroy the force of the injunction. Can so impersonal a feeling, we may ask, be fairly regarded as a passion, or as a species of hatred properly so called? Yet all who have read anything of Newman know well that it was a very real passion of which he was thinking, one which to him, and to his like, made charity a hard, if not an impossible virtue. In its purest form, with those who have some power of abstract thought, this passion may be impersonal, yet I think we may safely say that for societies and individuals in an undeveloped state as to mind and morals it is better that they should hate evil only by hating bad people than that they should be indifferent emotionally to the difference between good and evil.

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Strong emotions, whether of love or of hatred, seem to require a personal object. This has often been pointed out by preachers and moralists in relation to the possibility on man's part of a powerful affection towards the ideal good. And perhaps we might almost say that a personal object is likewise necessary to call out feelings of wholesome hatred against what is evil. In former times, and at present among a limited class of people, the belief in a personal power of evil, to whom all that is worthy of censure and hatred in all the world might safely be attributed, might seem to afford scope for the exercise of this feeling without the danger of loss of charity between man and man. But, in point of fact, such belief, when existent, is not strong enough for that purpose, and, indeed, where it prevails it by no means excludes the feeling of resentment against those who give themselves to the Evil One, unless, indeed, all notion of anything like human freewill is entirely given up. The state of mind contemplated by Newman is one in which the appearance of evil in all forms, even in the apparently trivial, causes such burning indignation, such an ardent desire to resist to the death all who are favouring or tolerating the growth of that evil, that nothing but the force of Christian charity, with its reverence for man as made in the image of God and capable of redemption from sin, can avail to curb the destructive impulses of the combative soul. The "charity" which "is self-denial still" is not the altruistic sentiment needed to counteract petty personal aversions, but the supreme power of love to God and man to which the noblest of emotions and energies must own allegiance.

The highest and noblest forms of hatred seem, then, to be of an ideal kind, and the same may be said of the

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highest forms of love or charity. The passions are to be purified and made to serve their proper functions in the composite nature of man—not by partial elimination, by weakening, or even by strict control, but by direction towards the ideal, by the guiding of hatred towards that which is hate-worthy and of love towards that which is love-worthy. M. Renan, in a beautiful funeral oration over an amiable scholar, paraphrases in application to him the dying words of Cardinal Richelieu. As Richelieu, when bidden to forgive his enemies, replied that he had none but those of the State, so, says Renan, this worthy man might have replied that he had none but those of the Ideal. Such enemies all who aim high are, it seems to me, bound to have. But no man is distinctly and avowedly an enemy of the Ideal. The demands of Charity are satisfied if the “good hater” feels that he should rejoice from the bottom of his heart if the “enemy of the Ideal” were to cease his strife and join the opposite camp.

In practice, however, the ideal element both in love and in hatred is not easy to separate from what is less pure. “We needs must love the highest, when we see it,” as Tennyson says; yet our discernment of high and low depends a good deal on our individual standpoint. We all hate ugliness, yet that which is ugly is trebly offensive if it hinders some private gratification or inflicts some personal suffering. It is not always the better or the worse, but the manifestly near or distant which moves us most readily to feelings of admiration or of disgust. And indeed, if the Christian law had forbidden the indulgence of any affections except such as had an ideal or partially-ideal object, it would, if followed, have made life monotonous and dreary beyond the schemes of the most inhuman ascetic. Yet it is

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true that Christianity as such has not much to say about the *natural* affections. It has often been remarked that Christianity raised and purified the domestic affections, and brought a nobler conception of duty into civic and national life. Undoubtedly such was its result in course of time, and the atmosphere it created was favourable to the growth of many virtues not peculiarly Christian. Yet it is to the teaching of Confucius rather than to that of Christ that we should look for the strictest inculcation of the reverence due to parents and elders. The pagan Spartan and Roman realised more vividly their obligation to work and to die for their city than did those members of many commonwealths that easily absorbed the Christian doctrine. We might almost say that natural feelings are taken for granted by Christ, as something belonging to "even the Publicans," and as more than included under the "righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees," which His followers were bidden to exceed. To be without natural affection might make one incapable of higher affection, but the love which the disciples should feel was to be a striving after the perfectness of the Father, and times might come when the rejection of natural ties and the hating of parents and brethren for the Gospel's sake might be required of those pledged to the following of Christ.

In general, however, natural affections tending to love and goodwill are, by the Christian standard, to be cherished in subordination to the spirit of universal charity, and to the love of the best for its own sake, a passion which should correct all aberrations and render the personal element in affection less powerful as a motive. On the other hand, those natural feelings which lead to repulsion and hatred are to be utterly

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condemned, as hindering the work of perfect charity. Nothing is to be hated but what is evil, in so far as and because it is evil.

These considerations enable us to discern more clearly what kinds of anger and hatred are clearly against Christian morality. To take anger first: we can hardly, I suppose, dignify with that name the repulsion we individually feel towards something peculiarly disagreeable to ourselves, but not remarkably hurtful in itself. Stoic philosophers like Marcus Aurelius were constantly trying to impress upon themselves the foolishness of being swayed by such petty repulsions. Yet it is not in human nature to be quite insensible to them, and they cause as great a hindrance to the operation of a wide charity and to the formation of a sound judgment concerning good and evil as they did to realisation of the Stoic ideal of a universal body of human society. I am thinking, of course, of such things as offensive mannerisms, disconcerting habits, mental and moral deficiencies not under the control of the will. The irritation they cause is certainly, though in a slight degree, a form of the anger that is contrary to charity, though perhaps one hardly ever finds a character so trained in the ways of universal goodwill as to be quite free from their practical influence.

Yet more harmful and unreasonable is the anger arising from jealousy, but this is so universally condemned as to need no comment here.

Then, again, there is the anger aroused by any injury done to ourselves. When the injury is involuntary, the anger is allowed by us to be unreasonable, and seems almost instinctive. Perhaps we most of us have a feeling for a moment of the nature of anger if we knock

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our heads against a wall, and it is hard to say what the object is. In my own case it would certainly *not* be the wall (as Herbert Spencer would have it), but my own stupidity for not remembering that the wall was there. When we knock our heads, figuratively speaking, against human obstacles, we commonly feel irritated against others and against ourselves at the same time, and such irritation, *within limits*, may become a preventive of future collisions of the kind. When, instead of this, it leads us to multiply such collisions, it is clear that something is wrong, and that egoism has got the upper hand. In the case of deep and voluntary mischief inflicted on us personally, Christian ethics lay down the duty of forgiveness. This, of course, extends only to the personal element in the crime and its consequences. Wrong-doing must and should move us to anger, as we have already seen, whether the object is ourself or another, and wrong-doing must be punished for the sake of the community. The anger which is against charity is that which is nursed and nourished on the thought not of the sin committed, but of the suffering personally felt. In the case of injury inflicted on others, especially on our own friends, it might be thought that more regard to the suffering caused and a proportionally greater indignation against the delinquent should be permitted. Yet, if we accept the principles which seem to be set down in Christian morality with regard to the natural affections, we shall consider that in this case also resentment should be brought into some proportion with the heinous character of the wrong done, and not vary entirely with the amount of wrong suffered.

For the rest, anger against low and base action is, as we have seen, not only justifiable, but essential to soundness of character. It is here, perhaps, more than

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anywhere else, that the popular moral standard falls lamentably short. It is surely not so much from excess of charity as from indifference to man that picturesque criminals and feather-headed revolutionists become with us such conspicuous objects of commiseration. Faults in children, that parents and teachers formerly regarded as worthy of punishment and as needing extirpation even by painful means, are now a days material for pictures in *Punch*, and for anecdotal conversation in family circles. Toleration is, of course, an excellent thing in its own place, but it is excellent only when it is shown towards people and things that are *not* manifestly evil. This quality is hardly to be regarded as characteristic of present-day tolerance.

What has been said of anger applies likewise to hatred, provided that the feelings called forth are strong and frequent enough to transform an habitual emotion into a fixed attitude of mind. Hatred arising from accidental causes, or such as are personal to ourselves, is, of course, more directly contrary to the Christian law than is the feeling of anger under like conditions. That which is based on resentment against an utterly ignoble character or a radically vicious society is permissible or even admirable, but only on condition that it is compatible with a sincere wish for the reformation of the individual or the society against which the just resentment is felt.

Some of the foregoing remarks apply to the feelings aroused by characters we meet in history or in fiction, as well as in real life. With regard to historical characters, I see no difference between them and the men and women of to-day in their claim on us for just and charitable judgment. Surely the world of history, no less than the world of present-day life, affords

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scope for us to train ourselves in love of the lovely and hatred of the hate-worthy. The case of fictitious characters is somewhat different, as our attitude towards them may influence our character, and indirectly, of course, our conduct towards others, but they cannot be said to have, even as persons in history have, a claim on our regard for good or evil. Yet the works of our best novelists accomplish for us the work of the Greek tragedians, if they "purify the emotions by pity and fear." Unfortunately, in this democratic age, writers of fiction are ever tempted to humour rather than to purify the emotions of the readers, by representing some odious things in an attractive guise and by abandoning the hard task of setting up noble and worthy ideals. I do not mean that the novelist is bound to have a moral object in his book. But if his own tone is high, and his range of observation wide, he may help his public to acquire through his means some of the lessons of justice and charity that wise men gather from their experience of the world.

To bring together some of the points which we have noted in the course of these brief but, I fear, not altogether lucid meditations; I think we may say that the hatred or anger absolutely prohibited by the higher Christian morality is that which has a personal bias, or a tinge of malice, and which seeks vent in actions injurious to the personal object of aversion; that on the other hand, hatred of sins with anger at all appearance of evil is a virtue exemplified in all the noblest characters, both Christian and non-Christian, one without which no manliness, warmth, or energy could ever exist. Christian charity, which is a very different thing from the easy-going kindness which has often usurped its name, is not only compatible with resentment against evil, but

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actually presupposes it, as the love for man as man should and must be accompanied by the zeal which opposes the degrading tendencies which have made man what he has sometimes become. True, hatred of evil and love of good are not always found in the same proportions in the same persons. Yet they are, in a sense, two sides of the same medal. And the enemy to both—the great hindrance alike to all-embracing charity and to ardent zeal—is not any growth of criticism, nor any enlarged views on the nature of virtue and vice, nor even any harassing doubts as to the means which lie within our power for opposing and conquering evil. Rather, it is the lazy selfishness which can bestir itself neither to love nor yet to hatred. For he who neither loves nor hates cannot realise the glory of that which is to be loved and worshipped, nor yet the foulness of the smoke which obscures the light of the soul. We “do well to be angry” with all that veils from man the object of his supreme reverence, and the path by which he might attain his goal—and which hinders the life in which he might live as son of the Highest.

**X**

***THEOLOGICAL READING FOR NON-  
THEOLOGICAL READERS***



## X

### THEOLOGICAL READING FOR NON- THEOLOGICAL READERS

IT is a frequent complaint nowadays that among persons who are seriously studying some particular branch of science or letters, so few are found taking an intelligent interest in subjects which lie beyond. Many students frankly accept the fact, confessing, without apology, that the absorbing interest in their own objects of study which is necessary if they are to rise above a flashy superficiality allows no time nor energy for any reading but that of newspapers and of the lightest kind of novels. Still, we have books of science, criticism, history, designed for the "general reader," yet good and sound as far as they go. Our mental and moral condition would indeed have sunk low if there were no middle-class between the dry-as-dusts and those nourished on circulating libraries. Some subjects, after all, can never be consigned to the specialist. History, the exploration of the world, art, the investigation of social problems, will always attract the attention and direct the thoughts and feelings both of those who have and those who have not some "special line" in study. The task of supplying the general reader with what he can easily assimilate is not as dignified as

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that of discovering unknown truths or working out bold speculations, yet it is not altogether to be despised. For if people only read a little of any one subject, it is extremely important that that little should be sound and good, especially if the reading is of a kind that, so to speak, works its way into the moral and mental constitution and becomes part of the life. These remarks apply especially to a kind of reading for which most people find some corner of their time and a larger or smaller share of their thoughts and interests—I mean reading of a religious or theological character.

We shall all agree that theological studies of the best kind demand a very special training in more than one field. For theology is not merely an abstract but also an historical science. How it has come to be so is an interesting question which need not concern us at present. It is enough to say that in Christian Europe, at the beginning of the twentieth century, we do not consider a man to be a really learned theologian unless he is thoroughly conversant with the deepest problems of philosophy, and well versed in the literature—canonical and post-canonical—of the religion which he professes. For while we must distinguish, in theory, the theologian proper from the linguistic critic of sacred books and the historical investigator of ritual and dogma, yet practically we regard some power of philosophic thought, some training in language and criticism, and some knowledge of certain branches of history, as combined in one—and that not by mere accretion of knowledge but by harmonious development and training of the highest human faculties—in the person of our typical theologian.

These considerations may suffice to convince us that we cannot many of us hope ever to be theologians. It would be well for us if they brought home to us the

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duty of proceeding with due caution and humility in forming and stating our opinions on matters concerning which the greatest doctors differ. But without any hope of our becoming adepts in the science of theology, there is a kind of theology—taking the word in its broadest sense—which is closely allied to practical religion, and of which we all desire some knowledge, according to our capacities and circumstances. Setting apart those people who do not live by books—who derive more from personal intercourse with friends and oral instruction from teachers than from what they read for themselves—some kind of theological literature is absolutely necessary for us all. The reason why we need not all be amateur geologists or amateur antiquarians or ethnologists and yet *must* be more or less of amateur theologians is not far to seek. We most of us need some conception of the Divine to make our thoughts of the world and of our place in it intelligible—or at least to redeem it from utter confusion. And all of us require an inspiration of somewhat above and beyond the world of sense to encourage our efforts after a life of duty and to direct our ways in the practical puzzles of our daily course. In short, we all need stimulus and direction in the religious life. And people who think even a little require knowledge of what seems to them—to use the tamest language—the most interesting of all the subjects to which the mind can ever be directed.

It is, then, because of the engrossing character of the objects towards which theological studies are directed, and the intimate relation of the problems they offer to the practical needs of life, that we require good theological books for the laity. We read, as we have said, for stimulus, for practical guidance, and for instruction,

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and the subject of theological reading for the general reader can be considered in relation to these three objects.

Some books are read for all these objects at once—in fact the reader hardly knows which object is most prominent to his mind in reading. This is, of course, especially the case with the reading of the Bible. The distinction between what one may call the devotional and the rational use of the Bible is excellently set forth by one of the greatest constructive critics of our day who was also in full sympathy with the religious side of the question—the late Professor Robertson Smith. “Ordinary Bible reading” (he writes) “is eclectic and devotional. . . . A detached passage is taken up, and attention is concentrated on the immediate edification which can be derived from it. Very often the profit which the Bible-reader derives from his morning or evening portion lies mainly in a single word of Divine love coming straight home to the heart. And in general the real fruit of such Bible-reading lies less in any addition to one’s store of systematic knowledge than in the privilege of withdrawing for a moment from the thoughts and cares of the world, to enter into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the God of Love and redemption reveals Himself to the heart, and where the simplest believer can place himself by the side of the psalmist, the prophet, or the apostle, in that inner sanctuary where no sound is heard but the gracious accents of the Divine promise and the sweet response of assured and humble faith.” The writer goes on to show how such devout use of the Bible, however valuable, does not help us much in arriving at the knowledge which comes of systematic study. The study of so complex a book as the Bible needs all the light that

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we can bring to bear on it from our knowledge of the various periods of literature and history to which its several parts belong, as well as all the mental equipment that we may have gained from philological and critical studies. Of course not every one has ability and leisure for Bible study in this sense. But seeing that we most of us make time for studies that we find supremely interesting, it seems natural that those of us who are fairly educated and not hopelessly overworked should aim at having at least a mind not perfectly blank on the progress of knowledge in these regions.

We must, then, distinguish between the devotional and the critical study of the Bible, yet the two kinds are not without mutual effects. To take an example: No one brought up in a Christian land can read those chapters in Isaiah respecting the suffering servant of Jehovah without calling to mind the story given us in the Gospels of the passion of our Lord. Yet every really intelligent reader will wish to go behind the traditional interpretation, and to know something of the historical growth of this strange conception of a humbled Messiah, so different from anything found in the earlier history of Israel, and, I believe, equally strange to the ideas of a later time. If he consults the best Hebrew scholars, he may find considerable differences of opinion, but the knowledge that he has obtained in the course of his inquiries will certainly modify his conception of the whole passage, though it will not destroy all the old associations.

In fact when we read the Bible, as when we read other books of world-historic interest, our impressions are in great part made up of reminiscences of past experiences, on our own part or on that of characters in literature and history. A very fascinating book "The

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*Psalms at Work*," has been written by Mr. Charles Marson with a view to preserve some of the grand associations of the best-known psalms. As we realise that the words familiar to us have brought courage or warning to men and women of every condition and character through all the ages, we feel anew the continuity of spiritual life throughout the Church's history. And this feeling is not materially changed if we sometimes allow that the original meaning of the psalm may have been quite other than that formerly given to it. The "*Psalms at Work*" may not be quite the same as the Psalms critically and historically examined. But the educated public cannot dispense with either.

There is, doubtless, in many people's minds a reluctance to study the Bible "just like any other book." They fear that such treatment is irreverent. In point of fact, however, no scholar worth the name is irreverent towards the literary embodiments of the ideas of wisdom, beauty, and law by which our forefathers have been guided from the childhood of the world. We do not want to level down the treatment of the Bible to that measured out to the books which we hastily peruse, classify, and throw aside; but we do wish to level up all criticism and all literary and philological investigation of good books to a point of reasonable, cautious, and sympathetic examination, such as we should feel no revulsion against applying to the Bible. At certain times in the past all biblical interpretation was allegorical. Grammar, history, geography had no hand in its elucidation, and philology was only used in order to find grotesque analogies and impossible derivations. Now, scholars of all various schools of religious thought are agreed that it is not only lawful but highly desirable

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to employ all the knowledge and skill at their service, linguistic, historical, and literary, in elucidating both the language and the matter of Holy Scripture. When they hesitate to accept the results to which these lines of investigation point, they may be influenced by extreme caution, by overmuch respect for tradition, possibly by professional or individual bias. But as far as profession goes, they are satisfied that the value of the Bible to mankind will not be diminished one jot when criticism has done its worst (or its best?). The time is probably not far distant when the distinction of history and literature into sacred and profane will be regarded as conferring no honour on the one while foolishly—nay impiously—disparaging the other.

But here I may be reminded that what prevents most people from studying the Bible in any but a piecemeal way is not a want of interest in the subject, nor a fear of having to relinquish cherished fancies, but rather a desire to keep aloof from an arena of conflict in which so many different parties have their own pet theories and nowhere is any consensus of experts. In a sense, such desire is quite justified. It is true that party and professional spirit have treated the Bible worse than any other book has ever been treated; that baseless theories, or theories with very small bases, have been started by innumerable writers who have had little training in thoroughness and logic; that the layman or the general reader may even be disappointed in finding some great name among the opponents of views that have in course of time come to hold the ground. But it is not only in Biblical studies that this is the case. In all comparatively new sciences—and Biblical interpretation, though very ancient, is now presented to us in a new phase—the beginner has to be warned off the most

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speculative writers until he has mastered the fundamental principles, and suspension of judgment—a most painful process to many of us—has to be sedulously practised. But we need never fall into the error—I had almost said the absurdity—of supposing that uncertainty as to difficult questions of history and philology suggested by Biblical studies has any necessary connection with personal uncertainty as to the chief objects of one's individual religious faith.

Before I leave the subject of Bible study I would say a word on the great advantage of those who are able to read at least the New Testament in its original language. Of course the English of the early seventeenth century is better, of its kind, than the Greek of the first and second centuries of our era, but we do not read the New Testament simply as a literary treat. We must not, of course, expect a slight knowledge of the Greek text—even if we are certain which is the best text—to cause the evaporation of all difficulties. In some cases a knowledge of the original is not very helpful to the general reader. With regard to the Gospels, for example: though even here we learn much by having access to the Greek versions, we do not get much nearer to the exact words of our Lord if we have them in Greek than if we keep to them in English, seeing that they were not originally uttered in either tongue. The Book of Revelation, so grand in our English version, sounds, for the most part, so crabbed in Greek that I should not advise anybody to read it except under compulsion. But with the Epistles, especially those of St. Paul, the case is different. We certainly do seem to get nearer to the meaning of the writer when we have his very words. Expressions which may have been to us redolent of technical theology

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become real and living. Even the non-Greek characteristics of the writer are made more evident by their being clothed in what was the one language of literature and philosophy in the part of the world for which he wrote. A slight acquaintance with the original makes us more familiar with the writer's tone of thought, and the help afforded by innumerable commentaries, especially of scholarly editions in portable form, makes it possible for a mere beginner in Greek to feel a quickened and more intelligent interest in this part of the Bible.

To go back to the different objects with which people take up religious books. Their use is for devotion, guidance, and instruction, the Bible being read with all three objects. Many other books serve more than one purpose at once, yet we may broadly distinguish between those which give us religious stimulus and those which supply intellectual food.

What is the kind of stimulus that we hope to derive from religious books? Perhaps there is more than one kind, but I would describe the most evident effects of a spiritually stimulating book in the following way: it has often been remarked that our lives are moulded not so much by our recognised beliefs taken generally as by those which we dwell upon in mind, having, so to speak, assimilated them into our being. Now whatever may be thought about "the will to believe," whether it really exists, and how far, if it exists, it can be lawfully used, there is no doubt that we can and should use our will in making our own those of our beliefs which we regard, in a sense, as important, yet are apt to let slip into the dusky corners of our mind. It may be safely asserted that almost all human beings who live in a civilised Christian society, even if their definite religious beliefs are reduced to a minimum, will be found to assent to

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some principles which, if they took their due place among the ideas habitually contemplated and the motive powers commonly followed, would avail to make life happy and well worth living, for self and others. The chief problem then for those who would direct into better courses the lives of persons of this kind is in some way to bring the great constructive truths which are already accepted into due prominence so that they may never be far from consciousness and volition. And with most of us the only means to this is perpetual reiteration. Not all reiteration is impressive; in fact unless it is inspired by a prophetic glow or at least by the warmth of moral earnestness, it is apt to become dull and to have the contrary effect of what is desired. For this reason, the choice of reading of a spiritually stimulating kind must be mainly subjective. Most people have old and revered friends among books, to which they turn for a word of wise counsel when in difficulty, or of comfort in distress, or for a glimpse of that which is eternal and immutable amid the harassing and absorbing cares of everyday life. Yet occasionally some novelty of style and tone may prove yet more helpful than long-tried merit. Not only personal taste but temporary mood may determine what is best for us at any moment. Yet there are standard books which will always hold their own in this field: I mean books like the "*Imitatio Christi*," the "*Theologia Germanica*," Jeremy Taylor's "*Holy Living*"—works of very various types, yet all of proven force to arouse and deepen the religious life of men during hundreds of years. There are times when one or another may seem meaningless to us, when the task of reinterpreting in practical relation to our own life and thought the words of those whose ideas were generally so different is almost

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impossible. Then we naturally turn to something more modern—to present-day sermons of an inspiring and non-controversial kind, or to some kinds of poetry. I would include among the books which I would call useful reminders of first principles some works of pagan writers, like the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, the *Encheiridion* of Epictetus, and some fragments of Cleanthes. It is quite legitimate to read into them certain meanings which go beyond the intention of the author, just as we make new applications of the ideas we take from the meditations of Mediæval saints and of Jewish psalmists. And if at any time the hold of Christian doctrine upon our souls becomes relaxed, there is some consolation in finding that if things come to the very worst, there is yet left for us some foothold through the swamps which separate us from a brighter shore. The conception of ourselves as part of one vast, orderly cosmos has been the inspiration of noble song and of nobler thoughts and deeds. In default of anything more cheering we may at least find some help in an idea like that which has helped so many of our forefathers.

The principle of subjectivity in religious reading may seem to some people dangerous, and it must always be used with caution. Those who follow their own fancies are always liable to become one-sided. For a great many people the observance of the Christian Year is most helpful in bringing before the mind, in a regular cycle, the thoughts on which it does well to rest for a longer or shorter time. The danger of one-sidedness sometimes involves that of exaggeration, passing into at least half-sincerity. Let me explain further: some religious books are sickly in tone, even if written by excellent people. A good many Roman Catholic writings

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(*e.g.*, those of St. Francis of Sales) are too full of perfumes and spiritual luxuriance, and lead to an aspiration after abnormal excitement of feeling which may bring with it a fictitious assumption, not exactly hypocritical, yet not quite genuine, of exalted emotions. There is a wholesome and an unwholesome taste in spiritual matters as there is in things physical and intellectual, and the best test is in all cases a practical one: does this or that feeling tend to enervation or to increase of power? The test may not always be easy to apply, but the principle may be readily grasped. Of religious emotions as of ambiguous prophets it may be said: "By their fruits ye shall know them."

A good deal of popular religious literature may be said to lie midway between reading for spiritual stimulus and reading for theological or philosophical instruction. Within this class come most sermons and books of religious history and biography. Of sermons, there are all kinds—from those of Butler, stiff reading and gratifying as to depth—to the quarter-hour's discourses of a favourite modern preacher. The sermon as a means of solid instruction has drawbacks. It must be short (at the present day), rounded off, and leaving no sense of something yet to come. Though great doctrinal sermons have been preached within our own days, I think that the most useful have been those which aim at suggestion and those which act as a moral tonic. Among the former are those of Frederick William Robertson, which have exerted an immense influence by the depth and clearness of the thought in them combined with intense moral earnestness, so that the hearer or reader is easily led up to a higher spiritual and intellectual standpoint than he could have reached by severe study. Among the "tonic" sermons I reckon those of Charles

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Kingsley, inferior as a thinker to Robertson, but so healthy and withal so spiritual in character that his words act on us like one of the bracing winds he loved so well. Most sermons, however, are not continuous or (if the word may be pardoned) serious enough to give us much instruction, and not spontaneous enough to arouse our energies. They are better as an occasional extra than as constant food.

With regard to religious history, it is a fact to be regarded with entire satisfaction that in our day, at any rate, the distinction between "ecclesiastical" and "secular" has broken down. Not only is the history of the Church seen to be so closely connected with that of the State that neither can be thoroughly treated apart from the other, but every great religious movement finds its adequate place in the social history of nations. This combination has been of great good to both kinds of history, especially to that of the Church, which was formerly left chiefly to clerics who, however great their desire to be fair, must necessarily find perfect impartiality more difficult than it is—or should be—to the learned layman. Again, lay work has reacted on clerical, so that the general reader who wishes to know something of Church history need not complain of dearth of good books. Still the difference between our ideas and those of past times, and the *odium theologicum* which is attached to so many great names in Church history often makes it difficult to realise the meanings and objects of religious leaders as they really seemed to themselves. Here we are often much helped by good religious biographies.

Since the religious biography is in ill odour among many people of good taste, and not without some reason, I would say a word or two about this kind of literature.

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There is no doubt that some religious biographies are sickly and unreal in the extreme. I think I may say that the very worst are those of some Roman Catholics and of the extreme Evangelical school. The reason is that if an author who professes to deal with facts aims at edification in the first place and truth only in the second, he is certain to miss both. Now a religious biography, as I understand the expression, is not a biography written only to edify, nor yet is it simply the biography of a religious person. A good many people lead notable lives and afterwards find biographers, about whom we only find out accidentally, perhaps to our surprise, that they possessed strong religious convictions and principles. But the object of a religious biography is a person who, whether through character or circumstances, manifested outwardly the inner springs of his spiritual life, so that the reader can trace the growth of his character and beliefs and enter into the spirit of his active work. When such lives are well and sympathetically written, they form the most inspiring kind of literature. The struggles of those who have ultimately conquered, the serenity of those who have nevertheless been tossed in many storms, the forgetfulness of self and devotion to the cause of God and of mankind, found in many whom their fellows did not consider particularly noble, afford us a vision of strength and of calm when we are weak and depressed, especially as in the greatest of them there is almost always a suggestion that the power which sustained them was not of themselves, but is still within reach of all who desire to lay hold of it. "Always have a good biography in read" was the advice given to her husband by that most spiritual and most practical of women, Catherine Booth. One would add to it: and do not keep always to the biographies of

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the same kind of people. The wider the acquaintance we can have of those who are best worth knowing, the further will be our outlook and the deeper our charity.

But the kind of religious reading which seems to require the most careful choice is that which we take up in order to extend our knowledge, lessen our perplexities, and generally to assist us in forming well-grounded and stable opinions on the most important of all subjects. Within the last thirty years there has been so great an increase in toleration for differences of religious opinions, an insistence on the absurdity of measuring moral worth by professed belief, a realisation of the great difficulty in the way of attaining even approximate truth on the highest subjects, that some people are apt to regard as wasted labour any efforts after truth or even consistency in religious views. But by students, whose life is framed on the belief that in all matters, even in regions where error is far less mischievous, truth is worth pursuing at the expense of much toil and self-denial, such a lazy, unmanly state of mind will readily be condemned. Yet the analogy of other studies would teach us, in our search for the highest knowledge, to walk warily and with much patience. There is a tendency among some of us, when a puzzling question on religious matters is suggested, to rush to some book which gives a half-answer, and to force ourselves to rest content with a faulty argument, such as we should be ashamed to accept in other fields. No one is bound to take, as the familiar phrase goes, a coach and horse to meet difficulties; but when the difficulties come, it is unworthy of an honest person, not to say of a servant of the Truth, to throw scorn on the men who have suggested them, and to go on as if they had never occurred. The

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noble words of Clough as to the way in which a new and startling theory should be treated need to be taken to heart by all of us: "Receive it not, but leave it not, and wait it out, O Man."

Religious literature which is and which only purports to be controversial is not so profitable as that which is constructive. Apologetics are seldom satisfactory reading, because the apologist can hardly ever understand thoroughly the ground of his opponent. Yet they may be useful at times. The deeper works which investigate the root principles of all religion are too exacting on the time and thoughts of readers for busy people to read more than a few. It is the more important, then, that these few should be works of real merit, not over-speculative nor yet superficial, nor yet dealing with other parts of the subject than those which the reader really wants to grasp. I do not think that everybody is bound to read thorough-going books, but everybody may be advised to avoid flimsy ones.

It may be said that my "general reader" is an imaginary personage: that busy people have no time for any religious reading except a small amount of what I have called the stimulating kind. We all of us, however, as already remarked, find time for reading the books that we care most to read, and in point of fact the great standard works on religious subjects have never been without a public. Perhaps one may be allowed to regret the time when—at least in many families—no reading was allowed on Sundays but what was, if not exactly of a religious, at least of a serious character. Brought up in a Puritan household, I shall never regret the rule—which, however, I should not think of imposing on others—that Sunday was the day for reading books of this special kind. Some young

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people might have thought this too severe. I never resisted it in the spirit—though I may have come to differ from my elders as to the kind of books to be admitted into the “Sunday” circle. Habit determines for most of us what is easy or hard, and I at least appreciated and enjoyed many excellent books which I should probably never have read apart from the Sunday rule. But, as I have said, I would not reimpose the rule on those who have been emancipated from it. I would only suggest that, apart from scraps of time in week-days, we have both our Sundays and our vacations in which at least some time might be given to serious reading of good theological or religious books.

As I have been defending the reiteration of truisms, I may be allowed to conclude with a truism myself. Religious reading, like other reading, is, after all, but a means to an end. No devotional reading can stimulate the religious life unless the devout spirit is already there. History and biography cannot help us to grasp the hands of fellowship with those that have gone before us unless we are already walking, or setting ourselves to walk, on the same road with them. No interpretations or adaptations of religious doctrine can illuminate the mind that is not determined to think for itself. All religious teachers, whether by writings or by words, can but guide our steps to the Holy of Holies which the individual soul must enter alone. Yet human fellowship is helpful, especially if it is taken as sign and symbol of a more than human fellowship which is not beyond our reach, even in times of loneliness, fatigue, and dread. If we could only realise this, our lives would be raised to a higher level, and it is in so far as they help us to realise it, that men of past ages, who have put out their hands

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into the darkness and felt that there was something there, deserve our constant gratitude. And the testimony which they have put on record is for us to receive and to hand on to the many generations that are yet to come.

**XI**

***TRUTHFULNESS***



## XI

### TRUTHFULNESS

**I**F any of us were asked to name any good quality in which we, as English, are generally superior to most of our Continental neighbours, I think the reply would usually be that we surpass other nations in regard for truth. I will not stop now to inquire whether this common national boast is justified, though I may remark in passing that in order to compare various nations in this respect we need to ascertain both what their respective standards are, and how far those standards are practically maintained. But I wish to draw attention to the great danger that lurks in a belief that any virtue is indigenous to the moral climate in which we live, and its contrary vice hardly worth fighting against. If we think that it is easy to be truthful, in the very highest and widest sense of the word, there must be something wanting either in our moral ideal or in our knowledge of ourselves.

This might seem a harsh judgment if I were approaching the subject from a didactic point of view, but I need hardly say here that I have nothing new to bring forward in exhorting to this or to any other virtue, and my only claim to be able to say anything at all on the subject is my practical experience of the difficulties which we must

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all encounter in trying to be quite truthful to ourselves and to the world. And these difficulties may be best understood and, in the end, best encountered, if we look more closely into the nature of this virtue which we all admire and which, perhaps, we may seem already to possess.

The many-sidedness of the virtue we call truthfulness or sincerity sometimes leads people to ignore its simpler forms in supposed obedience to its higher dictates. A little while ago, in conversation with a person of very keen sense of honour, I heard the opinion expressed that people who make much profession of Christianity can hardly be expected to be truthful and honest. As a bare statement, this would seem shocking and indeed paradoxical, for how can the professed disciples of Him who came "to bear witness to the truth," who seems to have stirred up enmity by His denunciation of hypocrisy and shallowness rather than by His positive teaching—how can they be worse than other people in transgressing the rules of ordinary morals as to truthfulness? The explanation is not far to seek. The persons of whom my friend was speaking were those teachers who cannot resist any opportunity of insisting on their own beliefs, and who have thus been betrayed into spreading their religious views among children whose parents have specially stipulated against any kind of attempt at proselytism. In the reports of zealous but ill-judged, and certainly in this point unenlightened missionaries, we read how ideas are instilled into children's minds which must tend to sap their ancestral beliefs, even though nothing can be laid hold of as contrary to the letter of any contract; how children kept in a room with other work to do while religious instruction is being given to their school-fellows pick up more than do the

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actual recipients of the instruction, and the like. Now such people think they are furthering the cause of the truth, while in reality they are showing how slender is their attachment to truth in its primary forms. But instead of condemning those who fail in temptations to which very few of us are exposed, let us consider a little what is involved in our idea of truthfulness. A brief investigation may show unsuspected weak points in the armour of us all.

First let me say that I do not intend to take up the negative side of the question, or to consider under what circumstances, if ever, we may be justified in verbal deviations from the truth. To be truthful does not simply mean to avoid telling lies, though a perfectly truthful person would probably be seldom found in a position which made a "white lie" seem necessary, and would generally at the moment discern the right thing to say far better than it could have been framed by long consideration beforehand. Social conventions—such as the expression of regret at having to decline an invitation, or the announcement that one is "not at home" when one cannot receive visitors—since they deceive nobody and are not meant to deceive, hardly come under the head of even white lies. They may, of course, be abused, as also may the tendency to make conversation more piquant by the use of grotesque exaggerations. But until they begin to impair the straightforwardness of the speaker and the confidence of the hearer, these deviations are not worth so much consideration as casuistic controversy has bestowed upon them.

Truthfulness, then, is compound in character. We may say, I think, that it involves three things—correspondence of utterance with action, which is generally tantamount to fidelity; correspondence of action with

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belief, which we may call consistency ; and correspondence, or an ardent desire and striving after correspondence between belief and reality, which may be called, in its militant state, thirst for knowledge, or love of truth in the abstract ; while in its triumphant state, or in so far as it is consciously attained, it may bear the time-honoured name of Wisdom.

I. To consider, then, first the correspondence of utterance with action : this includes the keeping of promises and adhesion to professions.

Now while everybody would agree that we have no right to draw back from promises given or to act contrary to professions made, I think that most people would attribute the difficulties we commonly raise for ourselves in great measure to prodigality and loquacity in making both promises and professions. So far as they go, promises, professions, and actions should coincide. But we need not promise all that we mean to do, nor profess ourselves all that our conduct shows us to be. In making promises, we most frequently err in promising what is beyond our powers. If we seem to have done so, our business is to make sure whether it is possible or not. Only three things, it seems to me, can release any one from a promise seriously made : the moral or physical impossibility of fulfilling it ; release on the part of the person to whom the promise was made ; or a change in circumstances such that the promisee would release us if he knew the change and were himself in a sound mental and moral condition. Little promises never trusted and only occasionally fulfilled are disturbing to the atmosphere like little flies—not deadly, but troublesome and often very pernicious.

Truthfulness in making and maintaining professions is by no means easy to people of a loquacious or even of

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a social disposition. When we are with friends we like them to think that we sympathise with them when we do not, we feign interest in what wearies us, we feel a natural tendency to represent ourselves as thinking much as they do, even if our views differ *toto coelo*. Perhaps we may be right in making the most of points in which we agree and the least of those in which we differ, and it is one thing to make false professions and quite another to avoid making true ones. Then, however we may dislike the thought, we *do* wish our friends to think well of us; we know there is no harm in making the best of ourselves; is it not natural to encourage their notion that we are cleverer, of better repute, of wider experience, than we really are? I am not prepared to say that, in a sense, such a tendency is not *natural*. But I do not think any of us would agree that it was in consonance with a perfectly truthful character.

There is, however, another region in which utterance and action often diverge with most pernicious results to the character, I mean that of religious professions and ordinary life. Now if there is any part of our life in which sincerity is absolutely essential, it is in our religion. Some acts of a religious kind are not taken as professions of anything in particular any more than are the habits of polite society. One may go to church, or read religious books, or give a kind of general assent to the religious habits of the society in which one lives, without laying oneself open to the charge of hypocrisy should one go one's way quite irrespective of the principles on which the practices of religious people are based. But if in any way at all one has overleapt the bounds of such neutral conformity, and has, before God and man, claimed, as an individual, the privileges and accepted

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the obligations which belong potentially to every member of the Church of Christ, then it is at the peril of one's own spiritual life and possibly of others' also, that one uses sacred words without any attempt to fathom their meaning, and acknowledges the strictest of obligations while practically denying their binding force. For instance, all who feel themselves bound by their baptismal vow, and indeed all who have tacitly accepted the universally acknowledged obligations of the Christian life, have promised to strive perpetually against the world, the flesh, and the devil—that is, in matter-of-fact language, against frivolity, self-indulgence, and malice. Now there is no doubt that the laxest view of Christian duty condemns the perpetration of spiteful actions and the nursing of malevolent passions. Self-indulgence is sufficiently condemned in its grosser forms, though there is a great toleration shown for minor but still lowering and weakening kinds of self-gratification, which any logical mind must recognise as pertaining to "the flesh." But how about the "world"? Probably it is not easy to realise in what sense we are to renounce it at all. We all feel clear that it is *not* our duty to renounce it as it was renounced by hermits of old or by pietists of modern times. Christians are to be "the salt of the earth," which would be impossible if they were withdrawn from the earth altogether. Yet there is a very real sense—more than one real sense—in which the obligation lies upon us as strictly as it lay upon any of our forefathers, in which the distinction is accentuated rather than blurred by changes in social life. I cannot dwell here on the Christian conception of modern worldliness. The point is excellently worked out in one of F. W. Robertson's sermons.\* I only wish to

\* On "The Love of the World."

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show how apt we are to condone a discrepancy between action and profession simply through indolence in neglecting to make clear to ourselves what our professions involve.

But it may be said that it is quite impossible to take all religious professions literally. The very language in which they are clothed is figurative and generally archaic, and, as I have before had occasion to insist, they must be clothed in symbolic form, since there is an element of symbolism in every expression of the relations subsisting between the human and the Divine. But it is vain, and worse than vain, to shroud ourselves from the light of unwelcome truths in a haze of vague conceptions. Either our professions have a meaning for us—possibly a somewhat different meaning from what they had in old times—or they have not. If they have, they are binding on us; if they have not, we had better change our expressions so as to give them a meaning for ourselves and others, unless indeed—an alternative which I would not accept and have not time to discuss—it is better never to make any religious professions at all.

II. To pass on to the second correspondence involved in the idea of truthfulness: that of action with belief. This is sometimes but not always identical with the correspondence we have just been considering, since utterance may be formal while belief must be real, and since also we believe many things which we never utter. Now those who habitually act on principles which belong to their beliefs merit the term *consistent*. Of course consistency is not always in itself a good thing. Where men are, as the phrase goes, "better than their creed," or when, on the other hand, they acknowledge principles to which they have not strength to conform, their inconsistency is better for them than would be a rigid

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consistency with the worse elements in creed or in conduct. Thus we regard it as at least an amiable weakness in a high Calvinist who believes in the eternal reprobation of the greater part of mankind if he takes pleasure in the society of children and is genial towards those in whom he can see no signs of predestination to salvation. And if a man is guilty of great crimes, we feel that he is not past recovery if there is still something to appeal to in him, some lingering regard for religion and morals. But in neither case is the inconsistency good in itself—it is only an improvement on a bad consistency. The recognition of the inconsistency should lead to the correction of the worse side. Creeds should be levelled up to deeds, or deeds to creeds. In the former case, a harsh and inhuman creed may be modified to suit the requirements of healthy human affections; in the other, the depraved life may be reformed by the revival of beliefs which have been neglected, not destroyed.

The chief causes of inconsistency in most of us are, I think, either inattention to the import of our beliefs, or weakness of will, or (often the same thing) weakness in faith; or else the neglect to dwell upon beliefs, to fall back continually on our first principles, so that they become the habitual determinants of our conduct, stronger than mechanical routine or than any desires or fears, physical or social. I once heard a curious incongruity between belief and action expressed in one sentence by a poor woman whose husband was suffering from paralysis. She told me that it was never safe to leave him alone. "Then what do you do when you go to your morning's work?" I asked. Her reply was, "I trust to Providence and am always in a fidget." Now this woman evidently had belief in a protecting Providence which, if she had been quite consistent, might

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have saved her from fidgeting. If it did not, she only expressed in naïf and almost grotesque fashion the kind of relation that exists in most of us between what we believe in theory and what actually influences us in practice.

To take another instance: we all of us believe that to do good work is far better than to achieve worldly success, and that success is by no means always a criterion of the goodness of work. This belief has been instilled into us in all our reading from infancy. The unsuccessful champions of noble causes, the patient toilers who have only attained permanent results after many temporary failures, have, whether presented in history or in fiction, always claimed our warmest sympathy. Our religion has deepened and strengthened this feeling, for it has held up before us martyrs for the faith who, to outward seeming, were certainly not successful persons, while the very symbol of that religion reminds us of the bitterest of failures—in all outward semblance—crowned by the most glorious triumph. Yet who is there among us that does not cherish some respect for success, however achieved, nor feel intensely desirous that it should evidently crown our efforts? Or, to put the matter more directly—since it would be harsh to say that desire for success was actually wrong—do we feel pleased with our successes and grieved at our failures exactly in proportion to their value as tests of good work, or do we not easily forget cases of culpable neglect or of slackness in work of which our conscience accuses us, if by some accident they have escaped the notice of our friends or of the world? I do not say this to disparage strenuous effort, which cannot be gratified without the consciousness of having done something well—if not as well as we might wish to have done

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it—but rather to call attention to the tendency, so characteristic of the present age, to judge of performances by their palpable results. We believe in one standard; we practically apply another.

III. But the third correspondence—that of belief with reality—is far the most important of the three, may, in fact, be said to have another dimension than the other two, since it has reference to what is external to our thoughts and actions altogether. Yet neither of the others would be of much account without it, for if we never promised or professed anything that, at the right moment, we did not confirm by our actions, and if we never acted in a way that was not harmonious with our beliefs, yet if at the same time our beliefs were not in accordance with the great realities of human life and with the highest truth that we can reach about the greater reality which encompasses human life, our fidelity were but the fulfilment of an empty pledge, our consistency but the pruning down of a dwarf shrub. Yet so hard is it for human faculties to rise to the attainment of the knowledge after which they aspire, that in this sphere truthfulness bears rather the character of a constant aspiration and striving than of a contented possession, points rather to a faithful quest than to a joyful attainment.

Of course I am not putting all kinds of knowledge on the same level, though I may safely assert that to seek for any kind of knowledge is to seek for truth under some form or other. Nor do I wish to enter into any metaphysical distinctions between appearance and realities. What we can all see, whether we are philosophers or not, is that the pursuit of even ordinary knowledge, in spite of the many pleasures that it brings, requires patience, self-denial, willingness to be convinced at the

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expense of losing a beloved theory, and that all these qualities and many more are required in "those few," as Milton wrote, "who labour up the hill of heavenly truth." We may, I think, apply the words here that "he that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." Some people seem to have attained great spiritual insight without much ordinary knowledge, but they could not have reached it unless they had been pre-eminently seekers, and the seeking mind is the student's mind, whatever the object of study.

I may therefore reckon a steadfast determination to make the most of our faculties in the search of knowledge as a large ingredient in the truthful character. I do not of course mean that it is a duty in all of us to pursue all kinds of knowledge, but it is certainly our duty to regard all kinds of knowledge with respect, and to avoid hasty formation of opinions without sufficient ground. And when any particular branch of knowledge has been chosen for special study, those who take it up are bound to follow it with a single heart, a clear mind, and a resolute will.

This may sound like a string of truisms. Yet, speaking as a student to students, I venture to say that it is not an easy thing to be perfectly truthful even in ordinary studies. Are we not sometimes tempted to rest in a hazy conception, when a little more effort would give us a clear one; to adopt the thoughts or the expressions of another without thoroughly making them our own? Does not the search itself seem wearisome in times of depression, and do not many who have been zealous for the investigation of truth drop their intellectual interests as soon as the pressure of necessity is removed? It is absurd to think that great achievements in the domain of knowledge are due to intellectual qualities

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only. Sir Isaac Newton may have been speaking with the modesty of self-depreciation when he defined genius as "the power of taking pains." But it is an inspiring, if in some ways a humiliating, thought how much might be done by people of quite ordinary mental fibre if they threw more moral energy into their intellectual work.

But, as I have already suggested, there is another region in which opinions have to be formed and principles investigated—a region which is not strange to any of us, though we do not always give sufficient attention to the duties that await us there. I would not say that every human being is bound to make a sincere and reasonable investigation of all his religious beliefs, but I do say that no religious belief is worth the name if it has not been somehow brought into connection with individual experience. I would add that no people who lead self-conscious lives (as at least all educated people do in our generation) are free from the obligation to direct their attention, in a spirit of profound humility, to the growths and changes in their own beliefs, to reject anything that may have intruded from an unworthy source, to seek for enlightenment, from whatever quarter the light may seem to come, on that which is doubtful, and to dwell much in the contemplation of such eternal verities as seem to lie beyond the range of any doubt. Is this a hard task? But, for thinking persons, is truthfulness, such as we are now considering, even possible without it?

Our religious beliefs, it is sometimes said, are determined by authority and reason. Each of these powers has its legitimate sphere. But do we not often, when self-interest, or indolence, or private fancy are concerned, acquiesce in an authority that in our inmost souls we do not respect, or accept as reasonably sufficient a mere

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tissue of fallacies? Here, where the thought of self-deception is the most terrible, we need indeed be ready to cut off the right hand or pluck out the right eye. Such sacrifices may not be often required of us; but if they *are* required, are we prepared to make them?

To take an instance: to many people religion seems to consist in belief as to a life after death, in which friends are reunited, the faculties of mind, if not of body, continue with increased vigour, and—to put the notion crudely, as it is crudely held—where things go on much as before, but more pleasantly. Such people commonly point, for the illustration and justification of their beliefs, to certain isolated passages of Scripture and to certain supposed analogies in physical nature. Now if these people, rising to a higher intellectual level, see that the passages of Scripture on which they had relied are better understood if interpreted in another sense; if they realise that nothing of so definite a character can be drawn from any part of the Bible, least of all from the sayings of our Lord; if at the same time they have learned that the world of Nature is dumb as to all that lies beyond her bounds, that her processes give no suggestions of the kind so eagerly sought—what are they to do? It is of no use for them to say that learning is vain, that their *heart* tells them this is true. The heart tells nothing that can be put in the form of a categorical proposition, and it cannot justify them in falling back on bad arguments and misunderstood texts. If they are *truthful* they can only say that they have been wandering from the realms of faith into those of fancy, that pleasant garden which to many proves an enchanted ground. They must submit to the limitations of our imperfect faculties, and for themselves as for others must renounce their baseless speculations as to

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a future of personal happiness for a belief in the Eternal Life based only on their faith in God. This is again a hard saying. But was not the same said of the sayings of the Master?

Truthfulness is indeed not easy to practice. But to give up the effort to reach it would be to renounce Christianity itself. We have thought too much of truthfulness in its negative aspect, as prohibiting false words and hollow actions. But even to avoid these we need to have the love of truth implanted in our souls. Nor does truthfulness ever flourish alone. By its side springs courage—for cowardice and falsity are commonly found together; patience likewise, for the quest involves much waiting, and the distant vision gives power to wait longer still; and, above all, faith, without which we should have no strength for so many arduous efforts, and which must ever grow stronger and clearer as those idols are removed which absorb so much of the devotion of mankind. And in its highest form love of Truth is merged in the love of God. When that point is reached, the heaviest of obligations is made light by association with the most triumphant confidence. The obligation and the confidence are thus wonderfully united in the pregnant words of the Psalmist: "Thou requirest truth in the inward parts; and shalt make me to understand wisdom secretly."

***XII***

***RELIGION AND GOOD TASTE***



## XII

### RELIGION AND GOOD TASTE

IN choosing this subject for our consideration I was not impelled by the hope of finding anything original or striking to say about it. What remarks I have to make will possess no novelty for any one who has given any thought at all to the matter. But it always seems to me a good thing that a subject on which many people have strong opinions should be submitted to a somewhat searching analysis, that we may either adhere to our position the more strongly, from a certainty that its basis is sound, or that we may seek to modify it in accordance with the clearer light that comes from a quiet investigation. Now, unless I am greatly mistaken, most of us hold very strong views, though we may not have consciously formulated them even to ourselves, as to the relations which ought to exist between the practices and observances of religion and the canons of good taste. It is not in the discussion and decision of abstract questions, but in the formation and assertion of judgments on concrete cases that we are wont to declare our minds in these matters. And cases of this kind occur, perhaps, more frequently than we imagine, because very often, when we approve or condemn any custom or any course of action, we scarcely know

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whether the arbiter is conscience or taste, whether we are referring it to the principles of right and wrong or to our standard of propriety and impropriety. The prevalence of this confusion, and the duty which lies upon us of trying to clear it away, at least from our own minds, will, I hope, become more evident to us in the course of our inquiries. Meantime, I think we may assume that, in spite of innumerable differences in detail, most people would give their assent to two statements as to principle—(1) That there are certain canons of good taste to which our habits of life generally, including our religious usages and practices, should, as far as possible, be made to conform; and (2) that in case of any collision between the interests of religion and those of good taste, the cause of religion ought to be preferred; although I think it possible that many people may regard any such conflict as out of the bounds of reasonable probability.

Now before we can ascertain what relations exist, or ought to exist, between religion and good taste, it will be well for us to clear our way by defining as accurately as we can what we mean by good taste, and inquiring whence its rules are derived, and in what parts of the sphere of religious life they are or may be operative.

Good taste, in the best sense of the word, may be said to consist in an instinctive or intuitive perception, whether natural or acquired, so as to seem natural, of the beautiful and the seemly in art and life. The rules of good taste observed in a society are certain conventions, supposed to have originated in the good taste of the community or of those members of the community who are held to be gifted with good taste, and who are therefore followed by all who desire to maintain a certain standard of orderliness and seemliness in the society. This definition, or rather description, is, I acknowledge,

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hopelessly vague, and I should be glad to exchange it for a better. Meanwhile I would submit that the fault of vagueness lies in the thing itself to be defined. There is a strong subjective element in good taste, since the appeal must always ultimately lie to individual feeling, not to a universal standard. And there is a strong conventional element, since those who are unwilling to trust absolutely to their own taste are fain to follow their neighbours without understanding the reasons for the rule adopted. But those who realise both the essential unity of human nature, and also the power exercised on the heart and mind of man by the conception of an abstract beauty and of a divine harmony, will incline to think that there is, after all, a real though not easily attainable basis for the distinctions we make, in blundering and inconsistent fashion it may be, between the ugly and the beautiful, the discordant and the harmonious. It may be that at some future day the principles of æsthetics will be organised on a scientific basis, and we may be able to determine what things it is good and wholesome for man's intellectual and spiritual nature that he should admire and love, just as we know what it is good for his physical nature that he should prefer to eat and drink. But of course such scientific knowledge could not give us a real appreciation of the beautiful, any more than a knowledge of hygiene will make a diseased appetite prefer the most pure and strengthening foods. In all judgments where questions of taste come in, we consult our own feelings, and those feelings have been moulded by our habits of life and by our deference to the judgment of persons or of societies supposed to be gifted with superior fineness of perception. Yet such questions are not, even now, entirely beyond the range of argument.

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If we have no body of fundamental principles, we have at least a good many *axiomata media*, recognised as authoritative in the various arts and in various regions of conduct. In structural arts, for instance, we have such principles as that ornament should subserve the general design and purpose of the whole. In the imitative arts we are taught to disapprove all tricks which would cheat the eye. In social life most of the rules of good breeding may be traced to a semi-moral code of observance whereby friction and superfluous shock and hurt to the feelings are to be avoided. And thus most people who try to lead a reasonable life are able to give some justification of their actions and preferences, some reference to recognised principles, even in the sphere allotted to the government of taste. People who cannot give such reasons may be actuated by a natural and healthy feeling which might be justified, if they knew how to set about the task, but more often, perhaps, their judgments are based on an artificial code of correctness, for which the utmost that can be said is that it may in some cases afford a useful check to the vagaries of individual caprice. While the rules of good taste are, as we understand them, so indeterminate in character, it may seem impossible to separate in practice, or even in theory, the genuine from the spurious. Yet we do distinguish, and we ought to distinguish more clearly than we do, between the results of the gradually acquired and tentatively expressed feelings of the more cultivated of our race on all that pertains to beauty and order and these rules which derive their sole authority and justification from the arbitrary mandates of Mrs. Grundy.

Now with regard to these more artificial and conventional rules of good taste, the great task of all

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members of civilised society is to make the most of any advantages they may afford, and to minimise the evils of their abuse. What use they have is of a negative rather than a positive kind, and more desirable in small than in greater matters. They help us to avoid what is outrageous where they cannot enable us to choose what is best. In matters like dress and house-furnishing we have to follow them to a certain extent, and so relieve ourselves of the intolerable labour of thinking out our principles of action in matters where no great principle is at stake. Even then they tend to obscure our perceptions as to what is really beautiful or the reverse, as the rules of fashion do not show much tendency to accommodate themselves to the principles of beauty or of structural fitness, and it is morally impossible for really fashionable people always to discover the discrepancy. We probably have all met people of artistic faculties and training who have failed to see that in a woman a wasp's waist is a monstrosity, and who prefer a sickly complexion to a healthy one. Even the dictates of a really refined code of social taste may be pernicious in checking originality and fostering irrational prejudice. Yet the tastes and the rules followed in the society in which we move cannot be safely ignored, and need not be wantonly outraged. Our last course is generally to adhere to them in the main, while remembering that they are far from infallible, and to endeavour, by subjecting them to constant criticism in the light of good sense and right feeling, to direct our course in life with as much liberty as is possible without inflicting needless pain on our neighbours.

I may seem to have wandered from the matter in hand, and some may be inclined to say that if good taste and its canons are to be regarded in the light just indicated,

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religion lies altogether beyond their path. For what our religion directs us to believe it recommends to us as true, not as beautiful to contemplate or as correct according to the rules of good society. And what our religion directs us to do, it commands with distinct authority, not with the uncertain sound uttered by the organs of social convention. To these objections I would agree in so far as to allow that only the form, not the substance, of religion has sometimes to appear before the bar of good taste. And we may also agree that in times of religious crisis, whether in the life of a society or of an individual, when really important truths shine forth and reduce minor considerations to insignificance, all care for good taste may be cast to the winds. A drowning sailor does not regard the artistic colour of the lifeboat that rescues him, nor does a soldier criticise the musical tones of the trumpet which summons him to battle. Yet while man has a body and a spirit he cannot ignore the importance of outward form, and while in his ordinary life he is guided chiefly by habits gradually formed under no strain of special excitement, he is bound to give attention to the influence by which custom and character are moulded. And that the views and habits of people in religious matters are not unaffected by deference to social taste will, I think, appear evident in relation to religious doctrine, to discipline, and to worship.

In all that relates to the acceptance or rejection of religious doctrine, one might expect that the operation of authority and of reason would leave no scope for that of taste. Yet a little reflection will bring to our mind cases in which a new doctrine, or a new interpretation of a doctrine already believed, has been rendered unacceptable by the repulsion it caused to the taste and

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feelings of those to whom it was propounded. A pertinent instance is found in the non-acceptance of Christianity by the educated classes of the Græco-Roman world during the first four centuries. Educated people found it barbaric and in bad form, and consequently they were not disposed to listen to arguments in its favour or to come within the range of its influence. If, in the days of St. Paul and for a good while later, "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble were called," the cause was not, as some preachers would have us think, that the Greeks and Romans held too high a notion as to the claims and functions of the human reason. They were quite capable of admiring and applauding rhetorical sophists whose utterances were very much more unreasonable than anything St. Paul could have produced even when in his most rabbinical vein. But they instinctively felt that the new kind of teaching was radically inconsistent with the whole system of culture by which all their tastes and habits had been formed. Our case is widely different. English people know the Christian Scriptures chiefly as a classic English work, produced at a time when our language was peculiarly vigorous and dignified; our modern literature is saturated with Christian thought, and we have the remains of mediæval art to show what Christian imagination can embody in painting, architecture, and sculpture. It requires an effort of imagination to grasp the thought natural to the cultivated world of the Roman Empire, that a doctrine expressed in such poor linguistic style, so unflavoured by the aroma of Hellenic culture, so little respectful towards the usages of good society, could not be productive of much good to any one. What arguments would have been likely to prevail against a feeling of this kind?

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In questions of discipline and Church government, though here again some would refer chiefly to the prescriptions of authority, all would allow some scope, many would give entire control, to considerations of expediency as tested by a wisely-interpreted experience. But in ecclesiastical as in secular politics, taste and fancy have often more determinant force than belongs to right reason. Questions of Church government are generally party questions, and a man's attachment to a party is in great part determined by his tastes and those of the people he associates with. Most people have heard the story of Charles II.'s advice to Lauderdale. When he asked Lauderdale his religion, and Lauderdale replied that he was a Presbyterian, the king told him that was no religion for a gentleman, he had better find another. It is to be feared that an argument of this kind would tell more with most people than would any proofs of the apostolic origin of Episcopacy or the evils of ecclesiastical democracy. A staunch Presbyterian who regarded his system as primitive and scriptural, and whose adherence to its principles formed part of his patriotism, might be proof against the tendencies of court and fashion. But children bred in a society which had taken the tone indicated by Charles II. would not be very likely to weigh carefully the arguments for or against an order against which good taste (as they regarded it) had pronounced a strong decision.

But it is in forms of worship and ceremonial that good taste has assumed a more complete jurisdiction. And these, forming as they do an important part of our environment in our daily lives, are very influential in assisting to form those habits of thought and feeling by which the current of religious life is, in quiet times, mainly determined. Of course I

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am aware that with a numerous and influential class of people, especially among the clergy, the observance or non-observance of certain rules as to ritual and devotion is regarded as definitely prescribed, and as a genuine question of right and wrong. But I think I am right in supposing that ninety-nine hundredths, of the laity at least, in preferring one kind of ceremonial to another, are guided by taste rather than by principle, while even the most rigid adherents either of an elaborate and symbolic or of a severely plain ritual would allow scope for free choice in what they regard as of subordinate importance. Thence in modern society comes the separation of bodies of worshippers, even within the same religious denomination, or at least among those who have no particular quarrel as to doctrine or Church government, into congregations differing from one another in standard of taste. This is, perhaps inevitable. We may sometimes be forced to accept unpalatable doctrine, or to submit to a government that we do not like, but to join habitually and sincerely in a religious worship, all the expressions of which grate upon our tenderest susceptibilities, is hardly to be accomplished by any whose faculty of worship, if I may use the phrase, is not very strong indeed.

If then we are agreed that our notions and feelings as to good taste are, and in our state of society must be, more or less operative in the principal spheres of religious life, let us endeavour to approach the matter from a practical point of view, and ask what principles should guide us in the formation of our standard of good taste in religion, and how we should act with regard to other standards than our own, and to the persons who follow them.

Our desiderata may easily be stated. To attain

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them is (alas !) a far more difficult task. We need on the other hand the highest possible ideal, for ourselves and others, in framing our standard. On the other hand we need the largest possible toleration in dealing with the needs and aspirations of our neighbours.

What we have to aim at is the realisation of the petition in our old, stirring morning hymn : " That all my powers, with all their might, in Thy sole glory may unite." Our religion ought to afford exercise for all our faculties, the intellectual and æsthetic as well as the moral and more directly spiritual. If it were, as it should be, the reflection and expression of all that is highest and most permanent in our nature, it should be so far removed from any conflict with our science and our art, that it should afford us the strongest stimulus and support in our search for truth and our endeavour to represent beauty. The Church of the Middle Ages was the nursing mother of all the arts and sciences. It may be that when we have passed through our present transition stage, the Church of the future will help forward in a somewhat similar way the learning and culture of days to come. There is not, but for accidental circumstances, any necessary controversy between religion and science or religion and art ; on the contrary, there is a continual war in which the forces of religion and of good taste in the best sense must always fight side by side. The conflict between the Church and the World has been from the beginning and will be to the end ; and in what relates to art and beauty, the spirit of the world, as renounced by Christians, is the spirit of narrowness, of partiality, of sensationalism, of self-complacency after small efforts, of thirst for praise after small achievements. That spirit is certainly not without its traces in the religious art and literature of our day, as we may satisfy ourselves

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by walking into almost any fashionable church or taking up almost any book of devotional literature. We are accustomed to criticise very leniently, or not to criticise at all but to accept as unfortunately below criticism, a great deal given to us in church which we should indignantly repudiate outside, and we endure patiently a florid rhetoric in the pulpit, a sickly sentimentalism in our hymns, a want of vigour and truth to life in our Church painting, which are but inadequately compensated by a greater care than some more artistic peoples need to take in avoiding the coarse and the monstrous. There have certainly been great improvements in this respect during the last half century, and though one feels that there is something artificial and morbid about the ecclesiastical taste of the present day, it is certainly higher and purer than that of our grandfathers. But we ought not to feel satisfied till the religious instruction and religious observances of our people from childhood upwards are such as to quicken and purify that love of beauty which in devout souls becomes one form of the love of God.

But now we arrive at the great problem : How are we to combine these lofty aspirations with a broad and charitable toleration ? The difficulty is one that we have often to encounter in other fields. Those whose convictions are strong and whose aims are high and who consequently burn with a longing desire to exterminate error and to propagate truth are often harder to bring to a forbearing consideration of the weaker brethren than are the weak-kneed and indifferent. And similarly those who regard beauty and order as among the best of Heaven's gifts must find it more difficult than do people of obtuser nature and scantier culture to overcome this feeling of disgust for what offends their notions,

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of religious solemnity and order. And as earnest minds have to be won from a persecuting policy not by any disparagement of the great importance of right belief, but by a practical experience that forcible insistence on the adoption of even correct opinions tends rather to encourage hypocrisy than to exalt truth, so those who would cast a social, if not a civil, opprobrium over practices which are incongruous with a high standard of decorum should be brought to realise, not that such a standard is impossible to maintain, but that if it is adopted without real appreciativeness, in obedience to the dictates of fashion or of society, it will be productive of a mere hollow conventionality, incapable of producing anything really beautiful or worthy, and may tend to check the natural expression of feeling which, crude as it may be, yet just because it is natural, may rise to a lofty vein. Toleration of differences in religious taste is in some ways more important to insist on and more difficult to obtain than toleration of differences in opinion because, to be good for anything, it must involve the suppression of natural and (within limits) very laudable feelings. Here abstinence from overt acts of persecution is not sufficient. No modern priest of culture and good taste wants to burn alive those whom he regards as rowdy and irreverent, though I have little doubt that if the truth were known many heretics have been led to the stake who might have escaped if they had not offended the popular taste. But what we want is a sincere and brotherly co-operation among all those that have the same cause at heart, with a recognition that they share a common life and hope as well as a common purpose. We need to be able to work together and to worship together ; and that we cannot do if we have any of the feeling of mutual repugnance which

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almost always accompanies strongly marked differences in taste. To overcome it must ever be a triumph of Christian charity. Let it then be recognised as one of the tasks that Christian charity must frankly undertake.

There are some considerations which, if more adequately realised, might help us towards a toleration of the kind desired, a toleration born not of indifference but of reason and kindliness. One is, that since our rules of taste are variable, changing with the growth of experience and maturity both in individuals and in societies, we ought not to respect them as if they were final and infallible. It is wholesome at times to imagine ourselves, with our present-day tastes and preferences, transplanted to some period of history in which conflicts and changes were going on, and to reflect how likely we should have been to form judgments which the decision of history has reversed. Might not the coarseness of Luther's language and his frequent lack of "sweet reasonableness" have impelled us to defend the refined and cultivated paganism of the court of Leo X. ? If we went further back, and saw St. Francis trying to bring religion home, by homely ways, to the life of the common people, might we not have despised him as a mountebank and fanatic ? I am not sure that if we went further back still, our refined feelings might not have been offended by One who excused those that ate with unwashed hands and opposed in many ways the ideas of decorum held by respectable people at that time. Those thoughts might at least make us assume the attitude of Gamaliel with regard to some religious movements of our day, which make respectability and decorum stand aghast, whether or no we assume as frankly as did the great rabbi the principle of the survival of the fittest.

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Then again we will trust our own rules and judgments rather less if we reflect that many things which do not shock us are at least as liable to be condemned by any sound principles of criticism as are others which make our hair stand on end. For instance, if we go to a Salvation Army meeting, and hear an assembly singing, or shouting, "We'll snap our fingers in Old Smutty's face," we feel, and have a right to feel, somewhat disturbed. But we have no such unpleasant feeling when, in the languid atmosphere of a fashionable church, we hear choir and people uttering without any conspicuous discord such miserable inanity as—

"Fruit of the mystic Rose,  
As of that Rose the Stem :  
The Root whence mercy ever flows,  
The Babe of Bethlehem."

In point of good taste, as fixed by any but a low, conventional standard, the two verses are about on a par, while the former has at least the ring of genuine feeling.

Another consideration which should lead us to forbearance is that we always have to allow for the power of associations working variously on various minds. Although we need not adopt the theory that *all* the beauty which mars our admiration is due to associations, yet they must always count for a good deal. Thus, for example, almost all Scotch people are wont to find much to admire in the old metrical version of the Psalms, most of which, to the world generally, seems the poorest of doggerel. But to a Scotsman the old verses come redolent of high moorland air, fraught with memories of those who covenanted and who contended unto death for faith and conscience in brave days gone by. And again, to many persons who are sensitive to

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the charms of historic associations, rites and practices which have come down from immemorial antiquity have a charm quite incomprehensible to minds that are exclusively practical or scientific. I believe that in many cases excited Protestants denounce as the fruit of childish superstition or of a hankering after Rome practices which historic Churchmen value chiefly as symbolical of the continuity of Church life and observance from the earliest times.

But, it may be said, Are there to be no limits to our toleration, even in the interests of the "weaker brethren" themselves? How then can the services of the Church be, as we have said they should be, a means of raising the whole man? And is there not some danger to our better nature if we are too ready to endure exhibitions of real vulgarity? We may allow plenty of room for individual or national divergences without opening the door to the floods of gross commonness. Martin Luther was too great, St. Francis too picturesque to be vulgar. The Scotch psalms are too old and quaint, Roman ecclesiastical ceremonies too elaborate and interesting to be open to such a charge. But must we not draw a line somewhere?

Perhaps we must, for ourselves and for those whom we are able to influence, but such a line must not be too rigidly fixed, and must be summarily removed the first instant that we find it hindering what is infinitely more important than good taste, the natural expression of genuine religious thought and feeling. But with regard to vulgarity, let us, if we are to contend against it, decide first wherein it consists. I think that what we call vulgar is so termed not because of any simplicity or want of intelligence which it indicates, but rather in virtue of a certain sleek self-satisfaction and a petty

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disregard of any but small interests and superficial appearances which comes either from essential smallness of mind or from habitual contraction within a very narrow range of occupations and ideas, such as allow of no thought or desire of anything beyond. Minds which dwell in a lofty region of religious thought, feeling, and action are, even if rude and contracted, I think, almost always free from what we generally stigmatise as vulgarity. Eloquent but homely teachers of the people, writers of fervid but unpolished religious poetry, men who have risen above their fellows through a spiritual greatness that has led them to be venerated as popular saints, all the best representatives of great religious movements among the masses, from the prophet Amos down to Mrs. Booth, stand high out of reach of our little rules of criticism. Yet undoubtedly there are people who, if not great saints, are very sincere and zealous for their religion and yet are undoubtedly low and vulgar in their tastes and prefer what is startling and unsightly in their religious worship and instruction. How are such people to be dealt with?

It follows from the principles already laid down that if by education, and by familiarity with the works and the thoughts of the wisest and best people, we can lead such persons to prefer an orderly ritual and a wise moderation in feeling and in expression of feeling, we shall do well. But if they prefer their own ways, it is of no use to be impatient with them. It may often happen that the expansion of the religious life is far more rapid than the elaboration of seemly forms in which it can be clothed. A man is often suddenly liberated from a thralldom to vice and a blindness to all things spiritual, and brought into such a vivid realisation of all that is most worth realising as brings with it

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boundless possibilities of virtue and self-devotion. This may be the work of a few moments. But a Christian gentleman or gentlewoman takes years, nay, generations in the making. To check the uncouth exhibitions of those who have great things to say and no respectable phraseology in which to put them would be indeed to try to pour new wine into old bottles, and the serious loss would be more in the quickening stream that escaped than in the vessel destroyed with it.

It has sometimes seemed to me that religion is not likely to suffer nearly so much from ardent fanatics who cannot accommodate themselves to decent and orderly ways than from fastidious, would-be sympathetic outsiders who dwell entirely on the superficially attractive, the interesting, picturesque, and artistic aspects of religion, especially of the Christian religion, so as to obscure its real import, which is so utterly different in character. Those who have read Pater's "Marius the Epicurean," or the works of a far greater critic, Ernest Renan, will probably understand the tendency I refer to. If the contest between religion and culture is ever to be peacefully ended it must be (if I may adopt and modify familiar and pregnant words) not by the lowering of religion into an element of culture, but by the taking up of culture into religion.

But leaving the higher culture out of the question, we may all agree that we ought not to let the conventional rules of social taste form a stumbling-block in the way of friendly union for work and worship, or in that of the strong and natural expression, in words or action, of religious zeal and endeavour. Among the many societies which exist at the present day, I have often wished to have one for turning Mrs. Grundy out of Church. If a certain moderate and negative regard for religion were

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not made an essential element in respectability, our Churches would be more free to strive after reforms of a kind that society requires and of which respectability feels shy. One of the chief objects, as we have said, of our codes of social behaviour is to avoid shocks as far as we possibly can. Yet an occasional shock is just what is wanted more than anything else in the religious world to startle us all out of our lethargic self-complacency, and bring home to our minds the nothingness of all our little rules and little systems in comparison with the eternal realities that our religious observances and institutions ought ever to keep before our minds. And as soon as we doze off again the shock needs to be repeated. Happy are the societies and the individuals who have found the teachings of their religion always in harmony with the best leanings of their intellectual and æsthetic nature. But happier still are they who have been able to recognise the voice they are bound to obey when uttered in discordant tones and in words that have no power to charm the outward ear.

### **XIII**

#### ***THE GROUNDS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY***



### XIII

#### THE GROUNDS OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

OUR next subject is not a novel one, nor one on which there is much fresh to be said. Liberty has always had so many votaries that none of her glories can have remained unsung. At the same time her name has always been one of those "defamed by every charlatan and soiled with all ignoble use." In fact, it has been so fruitful in claptrap oratory as almost to disgust us with its very sound, and to incline many of us to think that her merits have been exaggerated, and to look with greater favour on her stern and constant rival, authority. For the passions and aversions of the human mind succeed one another like the oscillations to-and-fro of a pendulum. In a nation and in an individual liberty ever tends to degenerate into license and leads to a reaction in favour of authority, which again degenerates into tyranny and leads to another reaction towards liberty. On this ground it becomes all reasonable people to try to realise the nature of the good things they possess and to distinguish the genuine from the counterfeit, so that they may to some extent preserve a mean when a reaction sets in to the opposite extreme.

First, then, let us define as clearly as we can what we mean by liberty. The first and most obvious meaning

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is absence of restraint. But this is not all that the word means to most of us. For on the one hand none of us would say that absence from *all* restraint was a good thing under any circumstances or conducive to what we call orderly freedom, so that the term needs further limitation. On the other hand, a merely negative conception never fired the song of a poet nor inspired the eloquence of a patriot nor sustained the spirit of a martyr. There must be a positive element in the idea of liberty. Perhaps as good a definition as we can frame is this: Liberty consists in such an absence of restriction as shall allow all human faculties and activities scope for their natural development and exercise. This is by no means a satisfactory definition, because some of the words used in it are themselves indefinite. How shall we determine the natural functions and the proper field of action of any human faculties and activities? We can only do so by setting up some normal type of man as a social, rational, and moral being. I shall assume that we have such a type before us and apply the definition—or description—to the particular kind of liberty which we are now considering, and say that religious liberty is found where we have as few restraints as possible on the search for religious truth, the expression of religious opinion, and the practice of religious rites and exercises, whether such restraints be imposed by the State, by society, by the Church, or by the individual conscience. Let us notice briefly the reasons why we desire the restraints imposed by the several authorities to be as few as possible and the conditions under which they can be reduced to this minimum.

On the nature of the restrictions on religious thought and action imposed by the State I need not dwell at

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present. The subject belongs to the sphere of politics rather than to that of religion, and has received due attention from the greatest political thinkers of our day. The first remark that I would make here is that in this as in other spheres we must not confound liberty with equality. Both are good things to have if we can have them, but the former is more necessary than the latter. That it is unwise for a Government to employ force against any religious observances or religious opinions that are not evidently and directly dangerous to the public peace and security may be asserted with tolerable safety in respect to most States at almost all times. That a Government should, in the choice of public servants and in the distribution of public emoluments, never on any occasion show any preference to the adherents of one religion over those of any other is scarcely a principle of universal application, but must be modified according as the general sphere of State operation is wide or narrow, and according to the political and social condition of every community. It may, at times, be positively unsafe to the public to put even a capable man in office if he belongs to an intensely unpopular sect.

The second observation I would make is that the reasons alleged in favour of non-intervention by the State in religious matters are often inadequate and not very cogent. Thus we often hear it said that a man's religion is entirely an affair between his soul and God. When people say this they may perhaps mean that a man's inmost religious convictions are often such as he need not and perhaps cannot express to his neighbours, and that it is useless and far worse than useless for any of us to inquire into the secrets of any man's heart in order that we may affix our label to him and think that

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we know all about him. So far certainly the maxim is true and safe. But if it is understood to mean that a man's religion is something quite apart from the motives that determine his conduct in social and political life, and that he can have no religion or a bad religion and yet come short in no duties to his family, his neighbours, his country, then I think that the saying deserves the withering scorn poured upon it by the leaders of the Positivist school, who, however pedantic and even grotesque many of their views may be, deserve our gratitude for duly upholding, against the tendency to anarchic individualism, the importance of the social side of every religion worth the name. It is, however, quite possible to hold that the prosperity of the State, as well as the happiness of the individual citizens, may be very closely connected with the character of the religious beliefs and practices prevalent in that State, and at the same time to hesitate to give the guardianship of faith and morals into the hands of the Government. For government, at the best, is a clumsy instrument. It cannot discern *nuances* nor allow for inconsistencies (numerous enough in this region of life), nor judge between false and true, innocent and pernicious, in any but plain and tangible matters. It can impose tests, but never so as to avoid giving an advantage to the hypocrite over the honest man. It may employ—it has employed—the most sacred of symbols so as to cause them to be desecrated by irreligious aspirants after office. Or it can commit the absurdity pointed out by J. S. Mill in the case of refusing credence to the evidence of atheists, which presumes that atheists must always be liars *unless* they are such liars as to deny their atheism. But means like this hardly avail to secure the services of good men or to guard against those of bad

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men, and, as Mill shows in his soul-stirring yet most reasonable little treatise on Liberty, the supposition that a Government—even a fairly good one—can always discern between the error that should be eliminated and the truth that should be welcomed, is reduced to an absurdity, and to something worse than an absurdity, when we consider a certain prosecution for impiety that took place in Athens nearly twenty-three centuries ago, when we pass on to one for blasphemy in Jerusalem four centuries later, when we regard the attitude taken up, rather more than a century after that, by the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, one of the very few philosophers and saints who ever exercised autocratic authority on a large scale, towards the only religious sect of his time that could rise above social corruptions which he deplored in vain.

Let us turn to look at the kind of restrictions imposed by the conventions and fashions of society. Now in this region the action of society is perhaps a little less clumsy than that of the State, but still more likely to be unfair. The State tries to put down what it regards as dangerous. Society affixes a stigma to what is unconventional. State intervention sets a premium on dissimulation and hypocrisy. Social convention puts a check upon originality and earnestness. I must refer again to Mill's treatise for a vindication of the claims of individuality. These are far more important in matters which relate to religious belief and practice than in any others. A man who is forced by convention to wear a coat that does not suit his fancy may yet find it a protection against the cold. But one who adopts the religious phraseology of the set of people among whom he finds himself when it does not express any part of his own convictions, or who avoids such practices as may be

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entirely necessary for his own spiritual health because his neighbours do not follow them, such a man loses his sincerity and starves his soul. Yet if, as we were saying just now, religion is not a thing of merely individual import, society has some duties in this respect which it cannot safely neglect. Every society has that indefinite property called its *tone* which is partly formed under the religious influences at work in it, and reacts on them in turn. When the tone of society is one of total indifference in such matters, we do not think that it is in a very healthy state. It is not desirable that loose and irreverent talk should be tolerated, or that practices which offend flagrantly against good taste and good order should excite no shock ; and however jealous we should be of influences inimical to individuality, if we run into the other extreme and delight in eccentricity for its own sake, we open the door to all manner of license and affectation. But there is a world of difference between the toleration which springs from indifference and that which belongs to Christian charity. The former ignores the difference between truth and falsehood altogether. The latter appreciates the value of truth, but acknowledges the extreme difficulty in the attainment thereof and the variety of modes in which religious truth is presented to the minds of various independent seekers. It hesitates to condemn honest people accused of any strange vagaries, but does not value oddness for its own sake. A healthy society, like every other healthy organism, naturally rejects all elements injurious to its well-being and assimilates what is good for its life and growth in whatever form presented. Yet we must remember that the power of spiritual assimilation, so to speak, is, as a rule, only possible when such a stage of culture has been reached that a distinction can be made

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between what is vitally important and what is secondary, so that truth and goodness can be recognised in alien garments, and when the chief moral principles on which society is based are so secure that no criticism is likely to overthrow them. The Middle Ages could not afford to be broadly tolerant, because the rejection of authority would have led not to criticism and reformation but to rebellion and anarchy. And in the eighteenth century, when a shallow criticism ran riot among a set of beliefs which were not very securely held, even while they seemed to be the only safeguards of sobriety and order, it was hard for some good men, who realised the danger of the rocks ahead, to be calm and tolerant. The intolerance of a man like Dr. Johnson is at least intelligible, if not justifiable. His religion, deep, sincere, and strong in its binding power, was one of fear and not of love. He retained his own faith tenaciously though without conscious security in that sceptical age, but could not in idea separate his faith from the whole religious system in which he had been brought up ; and any attack on any part of that system seemed fraught with danger to the whole fabric of society. All toleration seemed to him to spring from indifference. In speaking of the leaders of Pagan schools he said : " They disputed with good-humour upon their fanciful theories, because they were not interested in the truth of them ; when a man has nothing to lose he may be in good-humour with his opponent . . . being angry with one who controverts an opinion which you value is a necessary consequence of the uneasiness which you feel. Every man who attacks my belief diminishes in some degree my confidence in it, and therefore makes me uneasy. Those only who believe in revelation have been angry at having their faith called

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in question; because they only had something upon which they could rest as matter of fact." To which his friend Murray replied: "It seems to me that we are not angry with a man for controverting an opinion which we believe and value; we rather pity him." But Johnson retorted: "Why, sir, to be sure when you wish a man to have that belief which you think is of infinite advantage, you wish well to him; but your primary consideration is your own quiet. If a madman were to come into this room with a stick in his hand, no doubt we should pity the state of his mind; but our primary consideration would be to take care of ourselves: we should knock him down first and pity him afterwards."

It is plain that a man of Johnson's stamp could only become tolerant by becoming so secure in his principal convictions that no attack on them would cause him any personal uneasiness; or by calmly acquiescing in the submission of all his beliefs, primary and secondary, to the result of a searching criticism; and whether the verdict of such a criticism as he could have obtained from the sceptics of his age would have been, in the long run, more wise and trustworthy than the instincts and impulses of his own honest though prejudiced mind is a question we need not at present discuss.

But I do not in the least mean to imply that intolerance is found solely or chiefly where the prevalent religious views are orthodox and old-established. The cause of liberty has generally most to fear wherever a revolutionary reaction has upset the old ways, and the generation in power has a scornful hatred for all that belongs to the past. Such has been at times the case in republican France and, I think, in some sections of German society. The danger is at present less in

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England, but what it might be under a *régime* of democratic socialism we can hardly say. That society alone is free in which heterodoxy arouses no alarm or ill-will and orthodoxy no contempt.

The restrictions on thought and action imposed by the Church (among which I will, for convenience' sake, include all regulations framed with a professedly religious object and emanating from some ecclesiastical or quasi-ecclesiastical authority) may seem in some respects more necessary than any imposed by the State or by society, though requiring yet greater tact and wisdom in framing them and carrying them out. For on the one hand a man has not generally the option of deciding whether he will belong to a nation or a society, so that it is only fair to minimise the obligations laid on him from which he cannot escape. But, though most people are involuntarily received into the Church in childhood, yet the act of claiming the privileges and accepting the responsibilities of a member is wholly voluntary, and no man has a right to complain of conditions to which he has voluntarily submitted. On the other hand the dangers of insincerity are much more serious in spiritual than in worldly matters, and the imposing of any restrictions which might tend to destroy the simplicity and the reality of the religion of those within the pale of the Church, or to exclude from that pale any who would normally come within it, are both pernicious in effect and contrary to the idea of a Church as conceived by any but the most exclusive sects. Church restrictions, where they exist, are of two kinds—those relating to the clergy and those which bind the laity. But at present all ecclesiastical discipline for the laity is, except in the Church of Rome, so lax, the right to excommunicate is used so sparingly, and the

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responsibility of maintaining or neglecting religious rites and customs is thrown so much on the individual conscience, that it need not concern us in this place. In the case of the clergy, the reason why more restrictions exist is obvious. It is the right and the duty of those who bear authority in the Church to make sure that the doctrine taught and the rites practised do not fluctuate according to the caprice of the individual, but are, in the main, consonant with the principles of the Church in which he holds office. But at the same time it is clear that the fewer the tests imposed and the greater the variety allowed, the larger will be the scope given to teachers of original powers and spiritual fervour and the less the danger of stiff formalism in ritual. The vitality of a Church and its elasticity are commonly found to vary together.

I now come to the kind of restrictions which form a more difficult and dangerous subject of treatment than any other—those imposed by the individual conscience. Many people would say that if a man was not hampered in his religious thought and acts by the regulations of the State, of society, or of the Church, but was enabled in such things to be “a law unto himself,” such a man must be perfectly free. But if we recur to our definition of liberty, a little reflection will show us that even with the minimum of external restrictions, a man may have little real freedom. For either his nature may be in a disordered and anarchic state, so that his faculties cannot find and pursue their proper course of action, or even if conscience, the lawful ruler, reign supreme, she may reign in a tyrannical fashion, may stretch her authority till she allows no free play to the reason as it tries to formulate belief or to the feelings as they aspire after the object of devotion.

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Now if religious liberty is a good thing in itself, we may expect to find that the best result is reached where the restrictions imposed by conscience are not numerous. But if, as the general course of history teaches us, there are conditions in which a premature liberty is less desirable than the order secured by a vigorous and intelligent despotism, we may by analogy expect to find that sometimes it is advisable, and not, in the long run, hostile to a large freedom, in the microcosm of the human mind, for conscience, in accordance with some personal or traditional authority, to set temporary bounds to the range of powers which are as yet unaware of their strength and of their weakness.

“All things are lawful for me,” says St. Paul, “but all things are not expedient.” He is speaking of the restraints which people should put on their religious liberty for the sake of their weaker brethren. The words might equally well be adopted by the weaker brethren themselves, to justify the restrictions they put upon themselves for the sake of their own improvement. Those only are capable of exercising full and complete liberty who possess some strong convictions which can defy all assault, who know the range of their mental powers so that they are not likely to attribute too much importance to new acquirements and ideas, and whose whole nature is under such perfect control that the will always follows the dictates of right reason and does not avail itself of the temptations to self-indulgence which spring up when any established authority is called in question. People who are not so strong generally need at least some restrictions in their religious speculations and practices. Of course I do not in the least approve of any cowardly attempt to keep out the light of learning and criticism from the regions of religious thought,

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nor yet the clinging to practices which have quite ceased to have reality and meaning. But very many people are liable to lose a vigorous and practical tone of mind through living constantly in an atmosphere of speculation and criticism, and those who have essentially unspeculative and uncritical minds may best leave such things alone, although they need not condemn bolder thinkers, nor relinquish the hope of one day returning to the field with stronger forces. Similarly the disposition to discard religious customs as useless or superstitious may, in those who are not very strong, lead to a miserable spiritual torpor, such as might have been warded off by a periodic refreshment of the jaded organs of the spiritual life.

I fear that I may have seemed to present religious liberty in a very cold and uninteresting light. A mere negative conception, as we said at the outset, cannot arouse enthusiasm. But those who have expressed most warmly their devotion to the cause of liberty have not had their minds fixed only on a negative conception, — the absence of restrictions. Rather they were rejoicing in the relief which follows the removal of oppressive restrictions, and in the delightful activity with which their minds and souls pursued their course of thought, aspiration, and devotion, unimpeded by the benumbing influences of any merely external authority. I suppose that no one ever wrote more eloquently on religious liberty or spiritual freedom than did St. Paul. His idea of freedom seems to involve two things—the independence of the mind and the spirit from the exactions of the bodily nature, and the exemption of the whole man from any slavish adherence to mere outward ceremonies. Neither of these ideas was quite new in his time. The Stoics, as they had been the first to grasp

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clearly the idea of a universally prevailing natural law, were the clearest, if not the first asserters of the freedom to which a man can attain by subduing the flesh to the spirit. The Cynics attained to a liberty which amounted to brutal licence by neglecting the conventions of society. But I think that the positive element was much stronger in the teaching of St. Paul as to liberty than in that of the Stoics or of the Cynics. If he could rejoice in the triumph of the spirit over the flesh, it was because he felt within him a strength which was made perfect in his weakness. If he scornfully rejected the habits of scrupulous attention to minute points of ceremonial and legal obligation, it was because such scrupulosity was rendered superfluous by the "faith which worketh by love." The two apparently heterogeneous conceptions of the undisciplined appetitive nature and of a binding ceremonial law are fused together through this common property of outwardness, and comprehended in one term, "the bondage of corruption," as contrasted with "the glorious liberty of the children of God."

Let us briefly summarise the chief results of the considerations I have been trying to bring before you. According to them, we may say that a satisfactory measure of religious liberty is to be found in a state where the Government of that state recognises its incapacity to impose by positive laws any wholesome restrictions on religious thought, speech, and action, except in cases where such speech and action is directly and manifestly dangerous to the State itself. Religious liberty has force in a society where men have sufficient culture to know that what is good or evil in religion is not always to be immediately recognised by external marks, and sufficient charity to hesitate to condemn or even to cast a slur upon any man who, without rebelling

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against society altogether, does not conform to the prevalent rules of religious observance nor accept the current religious opinions. A Church has made progress towards religious liberty where its teachers are allowed to expound its doctrines and carry out its work without sacrificing honesty and originality, and where its lay members may find spiritual aid without sacrificing spiritual independence or individual responsibility. And an individual has religious liberty in the best and truest sense when, by faith and self-discipline, he has risen above the fear of critical investigations into his beliefs, and the necessity of any arbitrarily imposed ceremonial in his practice. Liberty is the best of human possessions where the community or the individual is fit to exercise it. And as to St. Paul the law seemed a *παιδαγωγὸς* to bring men to Christ, so we may regard all authority in religious belief and practice, however useful and necessary, as being only then truly effectual when it prepares men for the use and enjoyment of complete and perfect liberty.

**XIV**

***CONFESSION AND SPIRITUAL  
DIRECTION***



## XIV

### CONFESSION AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

#### (SUGGESTIONS INTRODUCTORY TO A GENERAL DISCUSSION)

**T**HE relative importance of the various points in which the Reformed Churches differ from the old sacerdotal systems of Rome and of the East must differ with the standpoint of each observer. To me no distinction seems so great as the presence or absence of individual spiritual direction. Questions as to the final appeal in matters of belief come home to thinkers; the bounds of civil and ecclesiastical authority are important to politicians; but the government of the individual life with a view to the eradication of all vices from the character and the strengthening of all forces which make for good—this must be felt as touching the most imperative needs of each human soul.

The practice of Confession may be regarded from two points of view : as the preliminary step towards obtaining priestly absolution and Divine pardon ; or as a means of putting oneself under practical guidance in the moral and spiritual life. The former aspect is prior in time. It may, I think, be regarded as part of the intensely legal view of life which prevailed all through the Middle

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**Ages.** But I do not propose to take up the historical side of the question, nor yet the sacerdotal object in Confession, which have both been worked out in a learned treatise by Dr. H. C. Lea.\* Those who hold to the sacerdotal view are always ready to distinguish the functions of the confession proper from those of the spiritual director, and so they can consider the subject of direction apart from that of confession and absolution; while those who regard the sacerdotal claims of the clergy as wanting in historical basis are able to discuss the question of spiritual discipline in relation to expediency in the broadest sense of the word. To this side of the matter, then, we confine ourselves to-day.

One point should, perhaps, be noted before we proceed further. There is a difference in the ways of regarding conduct and character followed by barbarous and ignorant and by modern and cultivated minds. Whereas of old men felt sorrow and shame chiefly on account of isolated acts of wrong-doing, to most people nowadays special acts of folly, unkindness, injustice, or irreverence are painful to remember because they are indications of certain dispositions likely to produce similar acts in future, or because they are evil in themselves, whether they bear fruit in action or not. In short, the object of spiritual discipline is seen to be not to prevent sinful acts, but to form a character incapable of committing such acts.

Now we all know that the Confessional was given up at the Reformation because of various abuses. In the Middle Ages it had served practical purposes quite apart from the sacramental character of Penance. Indeed, it is one of the many institutions to which we

\* "Auricular Confession," in three volumes.

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are indebted for benefits that are not comprised in its original *raison d'être*.

If we look at these purposes we shall, I think, see that some of them at least were not peculiar to the Middle Ages, that they require fulfilment just as much at the present day, and that more than one attempt has been made to attain them.

Some of the advantages derived from the Confessional are as follows :—

Firstly, it has assisted men in the laborious task of learning to know themselves. Roman Catholic writers dwell much on the mental and moral training imposed on the rude barbarians, who were obliged periodically to render an account of themselves to their priests. And can we say that at the present day any need of this kind is no longer felt? Is there no tendency among us to lapse into lethargic habits without knowing it, or to overlook in ourselves faults which we should speedily detect in others? And must not the need be tenfold greater among people who have never had the mental training which might fit them for the task of unaided introspection?

Secondly, there is a constant tendency to lower our moral standard, unless we are obliged periodically to pull ourselves up and see whether we are really making for our goal. It is a commonplace remark that enthusiasms easily die away, and it is a grievous sight to behold men and women who acknowledge a very high standard of Christian morals, but who, by accustoming themselves to compromises with convention and a certain flabby acquiescence in their own shortcomings and other people's, have lost all inspiration out of their life. Is not some means needed for bringing such people face to face with their inmost convictions, as no general pulpit exhortation can ever do?

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Thirdly, we want some means of availing ourselves of the experience of other people. Of course we can do so to some extent by conversation with experienced persons, or by reading good biographies. Yet many people have no friends from whom they can get much real moral help, and are unable to find their experiences exactly like those recorded in books. How many of us may have gone the wrong way to work in trying to make head against a bad habit! How little are we able to judge for ourselves whether our souls need the stimulus of reproach or the sedative of a temporary relaxation! How much help some suggestive thoughts of others might at times give to us, whether in the way of encouragement or of warning! There seems a field open for spiritual experts, who, like skilled physicians, might use their knowledge to recommend to one sick person a remedy that has proved effectual in a similar case. In one of Borrow's books there is a graphic sketch of a man who went half his life in misery because he believed he had committed the unpardonable sin, till it was suggested to him that many other people were probably in a like predicament. Had he opened his mind to an experienced spiritual adviser he might have obtained relief much earlier.

These being, from a disciplinary point of view, the chief advantages derived from the Confessional, what are the objections made by Protestants to that institution?

1. First there is the fear commonly expressed in the words, "lest any man should come between the soul and God." In one way these words express a wish for an abnormal and impossible isolation. For, in a sense, every man who has some spiritual gift to impart to his brothers comes between their soul and God, not as a barrier, but as interpreter and guide, somewhat as the

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artist or the man of science comes between us and nature, and the historian between us and the life of the past. Nevertheless the fear is not groundless. Isolation in religion is necessary to the fullest realisation of its whole meaning. Responsibility can never be greatly diminished. In a passage of the *Journal* of our late Principal,\* in her early days, she speaks of the desire for some powerful influence as equivalent to the sin of the Israelites in requiring a king. The thought is worth dwelling upon.

2. Then there is supposed to be a laxity and self-satisfaction arising from the consciousness of having laid oneself bare, accepted the penalty of one's faults, and not incurred any great penalty or serious reproach. We find that in the Middle Ages the right to choose one's own confessor was very eagerly sought after.

3. But far more important is the infinite mischief which an incompetent, not to say an evil-minded, director may do. There is something repulsive to our ideas in telling to a stranger things that we cannot breathe into the ears of those nearest to us. And if that stranger abuses his trust, or if he only fails to understand us, and throws us back on ourselves, our case is worse than it was at the beginning.

In fact the difficulty of maintaining an efficient system of spiritual direction by spiritual experts is like the old difficulty of establishing a perfect aristocracy. Let us be ruled by the best men, certainly, but who is to decide which men are the best?

Let us glance, then, at the attempt to provide something like spiritual direction without regular and compulsory confession.

1. First, there is the system of voluntary confession,

\* "Life of A. J. Clough," p. 44.

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suggested in some of the rubrics of the English Church. We find some men in various ages who had a reputation for understanding the needs of the spirit, and whose character commanded confidence. Such was Jeremy Taylor, whom John Evelyn looked to as a spiritual adviser. Many Puritan ministers held strong views as to the necessity of spiritual discipline and of a stringent examination before communion. But the present relations between our ordinary parochial clergy and their parishioners, or between Nonconformist ministers and their congregations, are in very few instances capable of being assimilated to those between director and penitent.

2. Again, we have the attempt made by some religious bodies to return to ancient usage and to discuss spiritual difficulties and experiences in meetings of like-minded people. This, of course, is the system followed by the Wesleyan Methodists. But I have been told that even among them the class-meeting is breaking down. Few people can relate their inward experiences simply and unostentatiously, and even those who can speak openly are apt to lose themselves in religious phraseology and sectarian convention.

8. Then I have heard of the custom of having a "soul-friend," some person who stands above us in the spiritual scale, and who attracts us by sympathy and apparent knowledge of our character. But this plan is open to some of the objections to the Confessional. A "soul-friend" is likely to err on the side of sympathetic indulgence, and to diminish the feeling of personal responsibility without always meeting our needs. And many people have no chance of making "soul-friends" at all.

We see, then, that in order for us to maintain a high standard of spiritual excellence, and steadily in our lives

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to aspire after it, there ought to be in the Church some means of dealing with individuals and of giving instruction, consolation, and warning in a more intimate way than by the often dry channels of our ordinary public services and sermons. At the same time, all means of securing such individual treatment, or discipline, seem to be fraught with dangers or difficulties. Have we any ground for supposing that it may be given to the Church of the future to work out the unsolved problem ?



**XV**

***CHRISTIANITY AS A HISTORICAL  
RELIGION***



## XV

### CHRISTIANITY AS A HISTORICAL RELIGION

THE tendencies of present-day thought with regard to Christianity seem in one sense to cut it adrift from history, in another to bind it thereto more closely than ever. On the one hand we have the notion forcibly expressed by T. H. Green (in his essay on Faith) that religious belief cannot be similar in kind to an acceptance of the statement that Cæsar was murdered on the Ides of March; or that of Amiel, that religion has to be brought from the regions of history into those of psychology; or finally, that of another writer on the subject\* that we "ought to render to history that which is history's and to religion that which is religion's." To these statements we may add the hypothesis of Professor Seeley,† that *if* the State were regarded as based on historical beliefs, as the Church is supposed to be, we might have persons resigning Government appointments from conscientious doubts as to the historical existence of primitive Saxon heroes. (Such a course does not seem to him more unreasonable than to let other historic doubts shut a

\* P. Gardner in "Exploratio Evangelica."

† In "Natural Religion."

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man off from a useful career in the Church.) In these four cases we have an acknowledgment both from the side of history and from that of philosophy, that the spheres of history and of religion should be regarded as separate.

Yet on the other hand there never was a time when the historical spirit—active in all spheres—was so eager in all that has to do with religion. The study of Christian origins has produced a large body of literature. In all places of theological learning, notably in our Universities, the study of doctrine and of institutions has become intensely historical. In the arrangement of religious services great regard is paid to ancient usage, so much so that “liturgical history” has become a practical rather than an academic study. Again, the historical development of Christianity now occupies a large place in the history books written by men who may or may not wish to rank as Christians. The principle of evolution when brought into the field of religion gives a historical interpretation to all the facts belonging thereto. If we take up the work of the least religious modern historian, or a religious discourse by the least historical theologian, we are surprised to see how—in name at least—the historian is respectful to religion, the theologian to history. What does the paradox of simultaneous separation and interpenetration really signify? If we examine and analyse each of the tendencies—towards severance and towards closer connection—in turn, we may come to the conclusion that so far from contradicting one another, they are mutually supplementary.

I. In what sense, then, has Christianity become less historical?

In the first place, it is not any longer to be regarded

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either as capable of determining the certainty of any historical events so that its adherents must necessarily accept them ; nor is it judged to have lost its own force if any historical events cease to be regarded as certain or even probable. For instance, though many Christians still hold belief in miracle to be a necessary preliminary to Christian faith, there are probably very few who regard the old "proof from miracle" as establishing an indispensable logical basis for Christian belief. We moderns believe in the unity of history in several senses, one of which is that no particular kind or series of events stands apart from every other kind as demanding a different order or standard of determination. And the canons of historical evidence are more severe and more definitely formulated now than they were even half a century ago, though some notion of the claims of historical accuracy are to be found in great historians of all periods.

It might seem, then, that history proper had ceased to be, in any sense, religious, that the investigation of historical fact had been rendered entirely independent of the religious belief, character, or sympathies of the investigator. If this were the case, we might be inclined to formulate the result by saying that the religious element in history had been transferred from the determination of facts to the interpretation of facts. For it can hardly be doubted that a man's general attitude in regard to religion must very largely decide his main principles both of theory with regard to human motives and duties—to life considered as a whole. And since history is nothing more nor less than the study of human life prosecuted under certain conditions and with special objects, the way in which any person interprets history cannot be independent of his religion.

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Yet even here we must notice the boundaries set by the modern scientific spirit to individual or fantastic interpretation. No series of events is to be interpreted as apart from any other series. The distinction of history into sacred and profane is practically abolished not only by the chronologist but by the historical philosopher. Likenesses and differences between Jewish and other Oriental institutions and ideas are accounted for by different means from those employed even half a century ago.\* Whether all history has become sacred or sacred history has become secularised is a question which assumes the change brought about by our conception of historical unity.

Yet there are some considerations which may be made in opposition to the supposed fusion of sacred and secular learning and method. If the case of the natural sciences in relation to theological doctrine is brought in to furnish an analogy, it is at once evident that the analogy is most imperfect. For there is a much larger field left in historical than in merely natural processes and facts for the operation of human feelings, and therefore more scope for religious ideas in helping to determine the truth. This appears whenever we rise above the baldest statement of material fact. Take the historical fact cited above from T. H. Green. If the question whether Cæsar had been killed on the Ides of March were brought into the field of controversy—if somebody should say that the event really happened on the Kalends or the Nones—the decision would lie with the chronologists working according to definite principles

\* Of course I do not mean to say that ecclesiastical historians of past ages have never been on the look-out for instructive analogies from secular history. But the very notion of *analogies* or of *parallels* suggests a separation of fields.

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on definite data. But if we were told that Cæsar was not *murdered* on the Ides of March, the meaning of the objector might be that the killing of Cæsar was a justifiable, perhaps a laudable act, and no murder at all. To get to the bottom of the matter we should have to investigate the character and lives of Cæsar, Brutus, Cassius, and many others, and there would be room for difference of opinion among persons agreed as to the external facts but differing as to moral judgment. Sometimes estimate of character affects the importance attached to external evidence. If Cicero had nothing to do with the assassination openly and outwardly, was he nevertheless privy to it beforehand? Or to take events on a large scale: the question as to the Christian persecutions under the Empire has been much disputed. Boissier in "*La Fin du Paganisme*" shows how much the opinion finally arrived at is likely to be dependent on one's notions of antecedent probability. The amount of credit we are likely to give to one authority rather than another depends largely on how it affects our feelings, not entirely by weakening the power of sober judgment, but often by enabling a sympathetic reader to comprehend some elements quite essential to the final conclusion. So it is with some of the accounts of early martyrdoms and with masses of literature on hagiography, which, primarily written for edification rather than for historical instruction, have nevertheless preserved much very useful material which an earlier generation was incapable of interpreting. Take, for instance, the whole story of St. Francis and of the early Franciscans. Two generations ago there were perhaps only two courses open. Francis must be despised as a charlatan, if not an impostor, or he must be credited with supernatural powers. The more sympathetic

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modern spirit, working chiefly on the old material, has discerned the beauty of his character, and perceived the moral causes both of the rapid increase of his Order and of its early decline from the original idea.

It is thus quite absurd to suppose that we can judge of anything connected with human life and character, especially of what touches religious life and character, by the same intellectual process, unmodified by passion or emotion, which determines the ages of geological beds or the rate of comets. But another consideration must here be brought forward: the enlightened religious historian need not necessarily be a religious man. He must have certain susceptibilities, but they need not involve practical principles. It is a noteworthy fact that among the historians who have illumined for us many phases of Christian life in past days are some who stand aloof from the Churches, "holding no form of creed, but contemplating all." But the converse does not hold. We do not expect to find devout members of any religious body whose belief does not make them more or less able to appreciate the thoughts and acts of like-minded men in bygone days.

To sum up the result on this side of the question, on the separation of the provinces of history and religion:—

Within recent times the standard of historical accuracy has been much raised, and the laws of historical evidence have become more severe; also the growth of the idea of unity and evolution in history has made it impossible for the modern mind to recognise any periods, places, or courses of events as lying beyond the sphere of ordinary history and subject to another code of rules. But at the same time a wider and more sympathetic understanding of human nature has rendered probable for us some events and actions which

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have their explanation in the spiritual forces which work in human nature. Thus while the historian will not accept either limitations or warnings from any religious authority, yet the quickening of religious sympathies may assist historical investigation by suggesting hypotheses, by modifying the judgments passed as to probabilities, and by assisting in the appreciation of the value of testimony. The action of religion on history is indirect instead of being immediate.

Before we pass to consider the ways in which religion has become more historical in recent times, we may note a change in philosophic study which affects the matter in hand—the separation of psychology from metaphysics. Now history has intimate relations with psychology, none at all with metaphysics. Religion is closely connected with both. On the metaphysical side religion is thus seen to be entirely unconnected with history. On the psychological side, as well as on the ethical, we should expect to find relations more or less intimate between the two. This may, perhaps, seem clearer at the end of our inquiry.

II. How, we now turn to ask, is religion, and especially Christianity at the present day, more historical than formerly?

In the same way, we may reply, that *all* life and thought have become more historical. We live in an intense consciousness of having sprung from the past and of preparing the future. In politics, in science, in criticism, we see everywhere the conception of humanity as a whole, in which past, present, and future form parts of a series. In principles of theoretical explanation and of practical rules, nothing is satisfactory which does not account for processes that began long ago and direct us in thwarting or furthering them now. With regard

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to religious ideas, this is pre-eminently true. A historical investigation of Christianity, in order to show how it has worked through the ages, is necessary to its rational acceptance or rejection at the present day.

But when theologians say that Christianity is a historical religion, they mean more than this. Some religions, having arisen from primitive conceptions as to the continued action of departed spirits or the immaterial forces working in natural phenomena, are without any definite historical element. Their ritual may have in part historical origins and associations, and in course of time *any* religion which belongs to one particular nation or one particular society must acquire a halo of memories and sometimes a real motive power from its connection with such society or nation. But these religions are not historical in the first place. They may embody ideas which grow and develop, their institutions may help to make history; but such developments are, so to speak, incidental not essential. Religions of this kind are that of the ancient Greeks and that of the old Egyptians. But a historical religion is one like Buddhism,\* Mahometanism, and Christianity, the ideas of which have been definitely set forth at definite moments in history by founders or teachers who have left their words and examples as a perpetual possession to their followers. Thus Christian apologists often remark that Christianity rests upon a surer basis than one of unembodied or only vaguely embodied ideas, inasmuch as the doctrines it asserts and the spiritual

\* It has been pointed out to me that Buddhism is not a historical religion in the same sense in which the term is applied to Christianity and Mahometanism, since there is no necessity for a good Buddhist to profess any historical beliefs as to the Buddha. Yet are not some forms of mystic Christianity and of Neo-Mahometanism practically independent of beliefs about the historical Christ or Mahomet?

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influence which it exercises are both due to certain historical events which, as they assert, can be ascertained and dated with approximation to accuracy.

Now the advantage of being historical in this sense has been in some ways an inestimable benefit to Christianity. When we read of the curious vagaries of some gnostic and other sects, and the vagueness as to ethical principles and general reasonableness often—though not always—found in modern times among those cut off from the main body of Christians, we see of what value it has been that the Church has always had the picture of a beautiful life and a willing death to hold up for admiration and imitation, a story of past manifestations of Divine wrath and love to act as a warning or an encouragement. The historical Jesus has been partly lost and rediscovered more than once in the course of ecclesiastical history. The “Gospel” has found new meanings in the pregnant sense of its ancient name. But, after all, there have been drawbacks to set against the good. Christianity has sometimes seemed rather a summary of past transactions than a present power. Intellectual doubt as to a series of obscure events among an uncritical people has been made a spiritual offence. Old forms have checked new and healthy developments. Is it possible to keep Christianity from the vagueness of a non-historical religion and yet to allow full inquiry into every part of its supposed historical basis, and free scope to all its vivifying ideas? If this task is within human power—aided by the Power that works in and through human consciousness—it seems specially to be laid upon the present generation.

Historical Christianity is the Christianity that first showed itself in certain events at the beginning of our era ; though what these events actually were is a question

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which modern scholars are painfully trying to investigate. It can be traced on through the institutions, culture, moral systems, and types of character of many succeeding generations. Its justification is to be sought in the merit of what it has produced, when we allow for its comparative weakness at certain periods and for the strength of alien admixtures. But the thing to be investigated is greater than its investigation. Many who belong to the universal chorus can only hear the music of those who stand near to themselves.

In general, then, Christianity is not based on belief in historical events ; but at the same time the influence of Christianity may help in the right appreciation of events. History does not assume any data provided authoritatively laid down by Christianity. But in the course of historical investigation truths are brought to light which may seem to testify to the beneficent power which Christianity has exercised down to our own times and also to make its reception compatible with adhesion to modern modes of thought. Of course the possible alternatives must be faced. Some interpreters of history have dwelt much on the hostile attitude sometimes assumed by Christian leaders towards human progress. And again, however beneficial we may consider Christianity to have been to the world, its beneficent effects are not to be crudely referred to the *whole* of the Christianity taught at any one time. Nor are we in a position to say that very erroneous notions may not, under some circumstances, have had happy practical results. No historical examination of Christianity can afford conclusive evidence of its validity, though it may confirm the witness of the soul.

The religious man who has a historical mind does not degrade the religious element in history to the level of

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what is "secular." Nor does he bring down history by subjecting its conclusions to the voice of religious authority. If history is not cognizant of the religious side of man's nature, it will be poor and one-sided. If religion neglects historical results and experiences, it will lack all power to reach and direct the modern intellect. History can only attain its noblest functions if helped by religion. Religion, if sufficiently amplified, can take all history into itself. But this it can do in the same way, and no other, as it can become the dominant power of the individual life. As, in the meditations of a saint, all his experiences of life stand to him as tokens of a presence that has been with him since he first began, so may the realised and recorded experience of mankind be fraught with spiritual meaning for a generation of clearer insight and of loftier thoughts than ours.



**XVI**

***MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS  
BELIEFS***



## XVI

### MAN'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS BELIEFS

HOW different the world is from what we should have seen fit to make it ! This thought, audaciously uttered by a few, has been secretly harboured by many, since man has first sought for signs of reason and of moral purpose in the system of things around him, and it will probably continue to arise until we learn within how small a sphere we may accept the ancient dictum that "man is the measure of all things." One part of creation that an "average educated person" would have constructed on different principles from those which actually prevail, is the human mind itself. Is it by some perversity in construction, or what is the cause, that problems commonly interest us inversely as they are capable of solution, that our best faculties wear themselves out in attempts to reconcile paradoxical propositions ? If *we* had to form a good thinking-machine, we should arrange its parts so that they might the most easily lay hold on, classify, and retain what really could be comprehended by such a machine. We should not let it spoil itself by fruitless strains, like a poor beetle I once saw, that tried to carry off a great boulder on its back, and sunk back, exhausted and I think lifeless, without making the least change in the position of the

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rock. Yet such is ever the habit of the mind when it first begins to think, and at intervals in its later history, whenever it tries to realise the results of its thoughts. The remarkable thing is, that whether we like the notion or not, much, perhaps most, of human wisdom has been reached not by direct search, but in the course of efforts to attain the unattainable. The alchemists failed to learn the secret of gold production, but they paved the way for modern chemistry. Columbus did not reach India by sailing west, but he discovered America. And much of our practical wisdom is the result of striving after theoretical perfection. We learn by painful experience the limits of our own powers, but we also learn many more cheering things by the way. Reversing the experience of the young Israelite who "sought for asses and found a kingdom," we start with the idea of acquiring a kingdom, and are happy if, on our journey, we obtain a steady, serviceable ass.

The most prominent, perhaps, of these fundamental paradoxes is the old puzzle of free-will and determinism ; closely allied to it—if not an integral part of it—is the problem as to how an individual may arrive at personal convictions when his conditions of life seem so conducive to particular beliefs. It is no part of our present task to attack these mighty strongholds. A humbler but useful work will have been accomplished if we are enabled to discern more clearly wherein the nature of the paradox lies, and the connection between the questions of free-will and of individual conviction ; also the *practical* dangers of accepting, in these regions, a one-sided and partial view as if it comprehended the whole. I shall deal chiefly with the choice or growth of beliefs, especially of religious beliefs, referring, however, to the larger question of individual choice in action,

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where it seems to throw light on the lesser, yet sufficiently important, problem before us.

Now, if one endeavours to put into clear, if somewhat crude form, the results of the greater part of what we may have read about the great question of the freedom of the will, we may attribute the whole paradox to the fact that we are somehow compelled to view ourselves and the world from two different standpoints, and the harmonising of the two views has, through all the ages, constituted the task of all philosophy. We view ourselves from within, by direct consciousness, or from without, by an imaginative effort. In the first case, self is the centre of all things; whatever else is discerned or believed in belongs to the environment or sphere of action of the self, or possibly is merely a modification of the self. In the second case, the thinker appears as an infinitely small portion of the vast system of things, a living creature moving and feeling among other creatures that live and move and feel. We *must* retain both standpoints. If we deserted the first, we should have no consciousness. If we lost the second, where were our activities? Yet while we alternately and unconsciously shift from the self-regarding to the world-regarding attitude and back again, we fall into hopeless contradictions. Thus it is with our great paradox. Looking around us, we see sequences of cause and effect prevailing among both animate and inanimate beings. We believe that *if* we had sufficient knowledge, we might judge from a man's character, antecedents, present physical and moral state, with all details of the circumstances in which he is placed, and the motives brought to bear upon him, exactly what course of action he would pursue at any particular moment. If we could get outside ourselves, we might attain the same kind of know-

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ledge of ourselves as if we were automata moving according to fixed principles in a calculable direction. But as we cannot, thanks to the active side of our nature, escape from ourselves into a region of pure theory, we cannot feel sure of what we will do, and we have within us the direct consciousness of a freedom of choice which ought, we think, to render impossible the prediction of our actions to any other mind—or even to Omniscience itself. But we do not stop here. By an act of sympathetic imagination, in which reason can hardly be said to have any part,\* we attribute a similar freedom to our fellow-men, and regard that freedom rather than our own imperfect knowledge of circumstances and character as the great hindrance in all attempted prediction of human courses of action. But this view seems to show a confusion of thought, as does the notion that any acknowledgment of the universality of causation must needs cripple the power of the will or bring in an idea of deceptiveness in nature. In fact, we are all determinists when we take the *outside* point of view, even if we include our past and future self among outside things, and we are all believers in free-will when we observe the workings of our own hearts and minds, and fashion our conceptions of other minds on the pattern of our own. Necessarians like J. S. Mill have left scope in their system for the feeling of freedom in practical life, and the most earnest advocates of the doctrines of free-will have never supposed that we ought not to take account of slowly-working causes in trying to estimate or to influence the character and actions of ourselves and of other persons.

\* Of course a case has been philosophically made out for the natural assumption that the minds and feelings of others are like our own. But the standpoint of the purely individualistic idealist seems to me by no means untenable.

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This brings me to the ethical side of the question, which is the one most connected with our present purpose. The chief interest that the whole subject has had for non-philosophic people, and even for some thinkers, lies in its real or supposed bearings on conduct and character. We hear it stated sometimes that belief in free-will is absolutely essential to a sense of moral responsibility and to the courage which assails great moral tasks. On the other hand it is affirmed that some recognition or order and uniformity in the sphere of morals is essential to all rational movements towards reform or preservation. In a sense, controversialists on both sides are wrong. It is easy to point to notably moral and to notably immoral persons holding the tenets of either school. But it is certain that from the arguments used on either side may be drawn excuses for the morally lazy and incentives to action on the part of those who are in earnest. "I am what I am and I can't help it" is an illegitimate appeal to theoretical determinism, while "I have it in my power to change my course and break my habits whenever I wish to" is an equally invalid appeal to the theory of free-will. At the same time the sense of freedom and responsibility, which philosophic determinism cannot, of course, take away, is a most stimulating incentive to vigorous action. Belief in free-will even in its philosophic form may tend to develop a very noble type of character, as we see in the life of J. G. Fichte. And a study of the conditions favourable or the reverse to honest and virtuous living is of inestimable value to all who aim at forming good habits in the society of which they form a part and in their own inner lives. In fact, it might be made an interesting and a profitable task to examine the interdependence of the

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two methods of moral improvement which belong respectively to the introspective and to the extrospective ways of regarding life and duty: the method of seizing every critical occasion for making voluntary choice between the better and the worse cause, and the method of training to virtuous habits by the gradual forces of management and discipline. But at present we must pass from the formation of character to the cognate subject of the formation of belief.

Now the analogy that I wish to trace between the two problems as to the causes of actions and of beliefs respectively lies in the fact that in both spheres we may take our stand at some imaginary point outside our immediate consciousness, among the throng of men of past, present, and future time, or we may retire within and survey the scene from the citadel of our own minds. And as in the case of action, so in that of beliefs, the extrospective view will seem impossible logically to reconcile with the introspective, although practically the results of both are needed to supplement one another in the task of constructing a dwelling-place wherein the mind may live and grow.

This distinction is not exactly the same as that drawn in the profoundly interesting work of Mr. Balfour on the "Foundations of Belief." He draws out the difference between the *causes* and the *reasons* of belief, and, especially in dealing with the relations of Authority and Reason, he shows what a comparatively small number of men's beliefs are arrived at by reasoning processes, and how large is the scope to be allowed for the "psychological climate" in which men may happen to live; also how even when we justify our beliefs by appeals to reason, both the belief and the appeal are due to a non-rational cause. Here, as elsewhere, Mr.

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Balfour does not save his readers the trouble of working out the results of his thoughts. His task is that of a woodman who fells the trees and opens out innumerable paths down which an eager traveller will pursue the ever-widening vistas beyond. And some of his expressions will be of use to us in our present distinction between the *causes* of belief as viewed from without and from within, especially as sometimes (not, I think, always) what presents itself outwardly as a cause is regarded individually and introspectively as a reason, and as the term "psychological climate" may be conveniently taken to denote that complexity of influences, subtle and patent, which seem the chief causes of belief to those investigating the subject from without.

Now it is evident that the question, "Under what circumstances and by what kind of people do such-and-such doctrines come to be or cease to be believed?" is fundamentally different from the question, "Why do I believe this or that?" The first inquiry demands scientific and historical investigation. The second requires reasonable and moral justification. Thus, *e.g.*, social and psychological conditions may explain to me why my neighbour A. B. holds that there is conscious communication between us and the spirits of the dead. If I hold the contrary opinion, I naturally account for my views in a quite different way. Of course the second question *may* be answered from the ground taken up in the first. I may conclude that I accept or reject certain doctrines because they are "in the air," or because I learned them before my mind had become capable of criticising, and have been too lazy to examine them again since. But in this case, when I asked the question "Why?" I must feel conscientious qualms like

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those of the moral idler, who takes himself as birth, education, and circumstances have made him, and makes no effort to change his character for the better. The questions, "Why am I acting thus? and why do I believe this?" are impossible, in moral beings, to dissociate from the questions, "Ought I to act thus?" and "Have I ground for believing this?" And as no possible combination of circumstances can liberate us from the obligation of doing the best we can under those circumstances, so no disposition in society around, no inherited membership in any Church or State, no knowledge, however scientific or intimate, of the systems and beliefs of our own and of other times, can prevent us from putting to ourselves the question of Pilate, and from seeking, for ourselves and ourselves alone, a basis of necessary beliefs, and some principle to guide us in modifying our partial structures in accordance with all fresh knowledge that comes to us from without or from within.

Perhaps in these days of solvent criticism and impartial or would-be impartial investigation in all fields, the great progress that has been achieved in the comparative history of religious beliefs and institutions is due in great part to the longing felt by many who have lost all inspiring personal faith for at least a vicarious share in the faith of others, to their desire to trace the potent working through past centuries of great religious ideas till they almost seem to fall beneath their sway and to enter sympathetically into the lives of St. Francis, St. Katharine, Fénelon, or John Bunyan, and feel, for a time, the nature of the spiritual influences that moulded those lives and characters. Among French people, whose habitual tone in government and society is distinctly anti-religious, we seem to find this outside

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sympathy in its tenderest and most melancholy form. Among some men of strongly marked character who have left the old moorings, not only the inherited regard for religion, but the predominant tendency (inherited or implanted early) towards a particular form of religion is very evident in their historical or critical treatment of religious subjects. Thus Renan is a born Catholic, Amiel (a Frenchman in expression, if not in race) a born Protestant, though both of them outsiders. There is a wonderful insight and a power of sympathetic judgment in many modern studies of the religious life written by men whose individual conceptions of life are non-religious, or at least non-theistic.\* Take as an example the "Life of St. Bernard" written by the author of the "Service of Man." In these cases, of course, historical science gains greatly from the fact that, whether from "psychological climate" or from any other cause, those who have written have understood (as eighteenth-century writers seldom could) the nature of what they were writing about. To the writers also, in so far as they are clear-minded, and true to their own convictions, the power of being able to associate in mind with saints of past days and believers in all ages, has been an unmixed good. No danger comes in until people of sympathetic temperament but confused habits of thought begin to mistake this appreciation from without for assurance within, which it resembles no more than does the sight of a party round a fire resemble the sensation of physical warmth.

If we turn to other spheres of belief than the religious, we see a marked distinction between belief properly so-

\* The lately published Gifford Lectures of Dr. W. James on the "Varieties of Religious Experience," presuppose the capacity and inclination of ordinary people to understand the peculiarly religious mind.

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called and participation in the general conditions which have induced belief. With regard to many statements commonly held around us, which we have never had occasion to examine or question, we can hardly be said to have either belief or disbelief. Below belief proper there are two states of mind in which we commonly stand to scientific or historical or æsthetic doctrine—that of acquiescence and that of acceptance. Take, for example, the theory of the motions and phases of the moon. If mathematicians tell us the length of time of the lunar rotation and its connection with the lunar phases, and do not give us any clear arguments by which we can see what the theory really involves, we shall not dissent, unless we are extraordinarily presumptuous. But we cannot exactly believe; we acquiesce. If a rival theory were proposed, we might acquiesce again, or suspend judgment, or resent the suggestion in virtue of our confidence, not in the lunar theory itself, but in the ability and truthfulness of those who teach it. If, however, our teacher enables us, even partially, to take in the main line of reasoning by which the theory is supported, we give it rational assent or acceptance. At the same time, if we think about it no more, it does not take its place permanently among our beliefs. We do not realise it sufficiently for much difference to be made, either in our general views or in our common habits of life, if some day it were to be disproved. But if we had followed the reasoning, accepted its results, and pondered the matter till any opposed doctrine had become inconceivable to us; if we had made ourselves acquainted with all the bearings of the subject, conducted experiments based upon it, taught it to others, studied cognate subjects, in which our theory was constantly involved—then indeed we should have made a personal belief of

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the matter, and the withdrawal of the belief would cause a *bouleversement* of our whole intellectual—perhaps partly also of our moral—fabric. Now if under these circumstances one outsider should ask another, "Why does A. B. hold this scientific doctrine?" the answer might be, "Because he is a nineteenth century Englishman living in a scientific atmosphere. This doctrine has been authoritatively accepted and lucidly expounded in his day, and his mind is of the kind that can respect the authority and appreciate the reasoning by which it is supported, and is also capable of fitting this theory into his general views of things and of discerning fresh proofs of it among the phenomena that fall under his special observation." But if the inquirer were to ask A. B. himself why he believes the doctrine, his answer would be totally different. "I believe it," he would say, "by the use of my reasoning faculties, which I employed first in following the proof of it, later in confirming it by my own observations and experience. It is not a matter of opinion. I know it if I know anything at all."

I do not, however, wish to press unduly the analogy between scientific and religious beliefs. There are at least two marked differences between the two kinds of belief which are almost always observed by those who write or talk about them. One is, that as the religious questions which are felt to be most urgent in demanding a solution have to do with first principles, the process by which the individual is conscious of having reached his answer is very seldom one of reasoning properly so called; although, so far are we from having attained to the practice of the Delphic precept, "know thyself," that we do sometimes *think* we have reasoned out some of the beliefs that we actually hold on other than argumentative grounds. The other difference is that in

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speaking of religious belief, we go beyond even the third stage mentioned above, and add to the idea of belief in general, that of a loyal acceptance of the doctrines believed in, a cheerful, or at least a resigned, attitude of mind with respect to them. Perhaps this only amounts to a recognition that the word *religious* belief is here commonly used in two senses: as belief *about religion* or as belief *held religiously*. This last is what is commonly called by theologians "saving faith," and a firm belief about religion, unaccompanied by any moral element is that which St. James ascribes to the evil spirits that most unwillingly, though inevitably, accept the doctrine of monotheism. It is perhaps characteristic of the somewhat unstable and backboneless temperament prevalent in these days, that most writers on religion almost assume as axiomatic the spiritual benefit of religious belief, regarded simply in itself. Yet surely nothing can be more irreligious than the defiant attitude of the man who, believing in God, dares to curse Him to His face. Such an attitude is rarely found now, when men who do not wish to believe in God can find plenty of reasons for doubting His existence. But the most cursory reader of mediæval history will remember the disposition of conscious rebellion and of Titanic defiance which formed, temporarily or permanently, an element in characters like those of our kings, William II. and Henry II. At present, however, we may consider belief in its less advanced and spiritual stage. For belief, in the sense of sureness, must accompany the theological virtue of faith, whether or no, in the individual conscience, one or the other is prior in development.

To return to our analogy between the formation of belief and that of character. We have seen that those

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who aim at improvement of character, whether in themselves or in others, generally set to work in one of two ways: they either try to bring the person to be benefited into a "psychological climate" favourable to the formation of good habits, and of feelings of approbation or the reverse towards noble or towards disgraceful actions, or else they appeal directly to the conscience and try to arouse in the individual soul the will and the power to choose the right and refuse the wrong in all cases where the two are presented to it. Now among those who regard themselves as champions of religious belief the same distinction is visible. It is perhaps most apparent in the opposite views taken with regard to the religious education of children, among those, of course, who agree at least that *some* religious education should be given. Those who take the "denominational view" have a strong persuasion of the influence of such a "psychical climate" around children at school as may render the beliefs and the reverence for certain ideals peculiar to certain Churches a familiar element in the child's life, so that in later life his religious associations, and his religious convictions also, are likely to be bound up with the doctrines and the worship of the Church to which he ought naturally (they conceive) to belong. The undenominational view," on the contrary, would not consider the "psychical climate" of the school as an important factor in the matter, but would regard the religious instruction of children as something to be inculcated by the direct teaching of morals and the application of religious sanctions to the child's conscience. To be really effectual, according to the most zealous members of the Evangelical School, religious teaching must tend to "conversion" and to an active acceptance on the child's part of the "Gospel," though such acceptance

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may be delayed or may never come at all. Those who take the broader platform would have those doctrines taught, and those only, which are common to the religious public of all denominations. But both sections of the party, however different in other respects, would generally agree in reducing to a minimum the devotional observances and the symbolic or pictorial ornaments—all, in fact, which tends to give a religious *tone* to the school as apart from the instruction directly imparted. If we bear in mind the importance of the "climate" as disposing the young mind to acquiescence, and as rendering easier the progress towards assured belief, and on the other hand the essentially individual character of such belief in its matured state, we may acknowledge that both "denominational" and "undenominational" educators have a real case and a grasp on at least half of the truth.

But how about the formation of beliefs in ourselves? In what way does it come within our own control? Here, again, it is evident that, as with the formation of character, we may, by accustoming ourselves to the companionship of certain kinds of people—in living society or among writers living and dead—render it easier for ourselves to take in certain ideas and to accept certain dogmas. One often hears it said with regard to persons of commanding personality: "When I am with So-and-so I can't help believing as he or she does." The same influence is all the stronger when it is held by a whole society, unless, of course, it be a society uncongenial to the person in question, though he is obliged to live in it. Yet deep down in our consciousness, we feel that under whatever circumstances attained, the belief is our own, and not ours and society's too; that we are bound, if we have attained to the recognition of our duties as seekers

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after truth, to shrink from no questioning concerning it, to throw it away, at whatever cost, if it prove to be mere prejudice. I can imagine that an individualist of the sternest type might regard "psychological climate" as an element to be, if possible, eliminated, in the search for religious truth. I can remember (if reference to personal experience be permitted) that when I was very young, finding myself in a "psychological climate" unusually favourable to freedom of judgment, it seemed to me a strange, almost inexplicable fact, that children of Roman Catholics commonly followed the ways of their parents, and likewise children of Churchmen, Dissenters, Jews, &c., and I regarded with a half-contempt, mixed, perhaps, with a spice of envy, those families in which all the children followed submissively the religious teaching in which they had been brought up. Of course, this view shows a misconception of the processes by which the mind generally reaches the highest measure of truth that it is able to attain, and it would lead to the thrusting on many feeble minds of a burden too heavy to be borne. The tendencies, inherited or implanted, the associations and emotional aspirations which are working in us and around us from early youth, form part—though by no means all—of our material for the temple we are to raise to the truth. But wealthy material alone cannot form a noble building without the organising eye of the architect and the patient toil of the workman.

To drop metaphors : there may be danger of a complete loss of spiritual independence if we surrender ourselves too passively to the religious influences around us, even if those influences are exercised by persons who command our esteem and honour. Suppose, for instance, that a person brought up on Protestant prin-

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ciples, with an inherited Protestantism in his tone of mind, be impressed by the beauty of some of the virtues which flourish best under the ægis of Rome, and feel a longing to acquire the habits of thought and feeling prevalent in some Roman Catholic society to which he may have access. Such a person, we may say pretty certainly, is on the road to becoming a Roman Catholic. Yet he is not likely to become one of the best sort, because his habit of mind is probably such as to prevent him from attaining fulness of conviction, and meantime, in his progress he has probably lost much that was almost essential, in his case, to a life of religious earnestness. He has lost the possibility of becoming a good Protestant, yet he has not become a good Catholic. These remarks do not, of course, apply to *all* converts to the Roman Church, but to those only who are *naturally* of another kind of religion, and have been drawn in by extraneous forces.

It may be thought that we have here a conflict of duties : Might not our supposed Protestant, in his desire to escape from the possibility of coming to believe much that he regards as superstitious and retrogressive, shut himself off from the opportunity of gaining, through intimate acquaintance with a society of devout people, some of those Christian graces in which Protestants are often deficient? This is, of course, a casuistical question which demands a special answer in each special case. If we have reason to think that a certain social environment would be favourable to our moral culture but detrimental to our independence of mind, we ought to try to live within the environment and at the same time to use counter-influences—in the shape of books, thought, or habitual criticism—against that in it which is not good. If thereby we lose the opportunity of

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acquiring certain virtues or graces which belong only to those who have thoroughly imbibed the atmosphere of the uncritical society which attracts us, we may rest assured that we cannot be morally losers through refusing to play fast-and-loose with our regard for truth.

But to turn from problems like these, which may seem to some to be wanting in actuality, though I believe them to be very real, let us see what advantages we derive, in our search for true beliefs, from the "psychological climate" in which we live. One of these is the capacity of attaching an intelligible meaning to certain words or phrases current around us, which to those who belong to another "climate" are empty sound. A person bred in a modern Christian country, or at least in an intelligent Protestant society, will understand, whether he be a believer or not, the terms used to denote the actions of the Deity on behalf of man, and the spiritual experiences of man in presence of great religious ideas;—the mighty and pregnant words: Atonement, Repentance, Regeneration, Communion with God, will be fraught with meaning for him quite apart from any significance due to their etymology and history. Nay, more, they will for him bear witness to the existence of certain realities—unknown perhaps in personal experience, or reduced to the ghost-life of an unsatisfied aspiration—yet realities still, of which account must be taken in any attempt to frame a system of working beliefs in which to think and to live. The feelings and habits, also, which have become customary with the individual, because prevalent around him, must often become the guides to a more genuinely religious life. Mrs. Besant, in her autobiography, of somewhat painful interest, remarks that her theistic beliefs—already tottering—gave way altogether as soon as she dropped

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the habit of prayer. Doubtless she felt that she could not honestly continue that habit, and it would be unkind to condemn her, but the result soon became very evident in her further alienation from Christian ideas.

I am not, however, speaking solely of those whose first "psychological climate" is one of orthodoxy. In fact a susceptible temperament will acquire, from one or more "climates" in which it has to sojourn, various needs to be met, great ideas to be held and meditated upon, principles to be followed out, authorities to be venerated. And our responsibility for our beliefs, like our responsibility for our actions, rests on our feeling that we are able, both in action and in contemplation, to use or to abuse the more or less favourable circumstances in which we find ourselves. We are makers of our own character and of our own beliefs in the same sense and to the same degree in which we are masters of our own fate. With the pressure from without and the feeling of responsibility within, we should be crushed between the upper and the nether mill-stone, if we had not some consciousness that He who made that which is without made that which is within also, and that the conflict would cease and the paradox would be resolved if we could reach a higher grade of faith and insight. For after all has been said and seen, subjected to the analysis of reason, contemplated in the glowing light of the sympathetic imagination, something more is needed to fire the soul with inward conviction. "Happy is he," wrote a pious man of old, "whom truth by itself doth teach, not by figures and words that pass away, but as it is in itself. . . . Let all doctors hold their peace, let all creatures be silent in Thy sight; speak Thou alone unto me."

Impassable indeed is the gulf that divides each one of

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us from all our brethren. "I shall die alone," wrote Pascal. And assuredly we must all will alone and believe alone. Yet we must needs think that neither our volitions nor our beliefs are in and for us alone. Perhaps the great isolation must be brought home to us before we can attain to a higher union. We must be alone before we can feel that the Father is with us. We must "cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils" before we can all be "builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."



**XVII**

***THE MORAL TEACHING OF HISTORY***



## XVII

### THE MORAL TEACHING OF HISTORY

WHY should we look to history for a clearer moral teaching than we expect to find in most other studies? The fact that all through past times people have regarded history as having a special moral import - and interest need not imply that such a view is reasonable. It may be only due to the backward state of historical science. When mathematics were in their infancy, they were supposed to be full of instruction for the harmonious ordering of life. Several of the natural sciences as set forth in old-fashioned text-books seem worthy of study chiefly as suggesting reflections on the wonderful adaptations of means to ends by which man may learn the purposes of the Creator. But in the physical and biological sciences, and even in those that have to do with the mind of man, we have come to recognise that the chief aim of the student should be to seek for truth, not for edification, that the study of what *is* should be kept distinct from that of what *ought to be*, that to allow considerations of teleology or of practical morality to enter into any sciences concerned with facts and deductions from facts is prejudicial alike to science, to morals, and to religion. Astronomy was hindered, and morals not much helped, by moral and

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- mystic meanings attached to the perfect circle and to the number seven. Students of geology and biology have, as such, nothing to do with creative purposes ; they have but to examine facts and to trace processes. Similarly,
- the more scientific the study of history becomes, the more clearly will it be recognised that the task of the historian is to observe, generalise, and reason on the material at his disposal, and that if he allows his judgment to be biassed by a desire to convey a moral lesson, he is extremely likely to distort facts, and so to fail in
  - history and in morality likewise. Yet as a further knowledge of the laws of physical nature, when investigated with a single eye to the discovery of truth, has enlarged our conceptions of beauty and of order, much more may a careful and disinterested study of the course of human affairs and of the interaction of social forces be expected to have some important results in our feelings and opinions on human destinies and human duties. I
  - do not wish, however, to restrict the term *history* to the more methodical and scientific study of human affairs—still less would I confine it to one particular field of human life, such as politics. It will be more in accordance with our present purpose if I use the term in its wide and popular sense, so as to cover all the results of the labours by which the general narrative of human events has been constructed, those by which the lives and characters of men and societies in past ages have been truthfully and graphically brought before us, and those by which the causes and sequences of events have, within certain limits, been examined and determined.

- What kind of lessons have men expected to learn from
- history? The answer to this question varies with the various stages of development of historical studies, yet

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in every stage what men have sought has been some indication of a power working either above or else through all human affairs, punishing breaches of the moral law, visiting, it may be, the sins of the fathers upon the children, or, according to a loftier and more refined conception, educating the human race and leading men and races of men through conflict and suffering from a lower to a higher stage of existence. In the earliest, the epic stage of history, which tells us chiefly of the deeds of great heroes and law-givers, men look to see manifestations of supernatural power working with those who are carrying out the will of heaven, and abasing their adversaries. This does not always imply the exact apportioning of success to individual merit or virtue. According to the crude religious notions of most early peoples, the will of God or of the gods is not identified even with their highest ideal of human virtue. A kind of caprice is seen even in Divine visitations for sin, as some sins—such as breach of oaths in which appeal has been made to Heaven, or that insolence which defies the commands of the gods and arrogates power to man—are more liable to provoke the Divine wrath than others which are no less heinous in men's judgment but do not manifest a character of sacrilege. Nay, ignorance is punished almost equally with sin, if the offender have unwittingly transgressed a Divine law. Still, on the whole, and ever more and more as man becomes more thoughtful and more social, he comes to regard Divine judgments as directed against the wicked, Divine favour as upholding the righteous. When historians come to concern themselves less with individuals and more with nations, movements, and causes, they look for a different kind of manifestation of the Divine Justice—not merely as affecting the lives of individuals or of small bands of

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men, but as maintaining righteous causes and bringing about the triumph of nobler races over those that are degraded. When we come to a wider field still, and consider humanity as one, and the whole course of human progress as one connected whole, we are inclined to expect to see something like a plan running through it all, giving unity to the great drama, bringing about a more just and fair distribution of happiness among men than we have ever as yet attained, eliminating all pernicious tendencies, and forming mankind into one peaceable and contented brotherhood. And it is generally because these results, or some of these results, are supposed to have been attained by historians, that history has been regarded as specially fraught with moral instruction.

Let us now consider briefly the different ways in which history has been interpreted so as to yield these moral results, and inquire how far they may be safely and legitimately pursued. For in historical interpretation it certainly does not hold good that the end justifies the means. We must be content to relinquish what seem to be excellent moral teachings, if we find that they are based on careless observations or hasty generalisations.

The first and simplest way in which men have thought to trace the workings of a moral purpose and meaning in history has been to try to find out particular interferences with the usual order of things, unexpected occurrences, special providences as they are sometimes called, which suddenly frustrate the efforts of the wicked and give the victory to the good man or to the good cause. We are told of warning dreams, of portents, of sudden deaths, of earthquakes and storms, by which the efforts of men were either supported or entirely super-

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sed. Stories of such interventions are found without number in the records of simple, uncritical people. But I think it will be generally acknowledged that the more men learn about Nature and the more they meditate on human life, the less stress they are inclined to lay on such special providential interventions. It is not that such interventions are proved to be impossible—for we do not know enough of the whole system of things to be able to pronounce readily on the possible or impossible—but that they certainly do not occur with such regularity or so manifestly that we can either rely upon them in practical life or interpret history by their means. To look out for them constantly would make people either very imprudent or callously fatalistic in their life and conduct, and in the field of history would open a door to credulity and to all kinds of rash deductions. Morally, it leads to the worst of errors, that of measuring merit by outward success. And it is contrary to the Christian view of the Divine government. For surely it is better to believe in the Father in heaven who “maketh His sun to shine on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust,” than to pray to the Almighty to “shoot out His arrows and consume” our enemies, or to fancy that “the stars in their courses fought against Sisera.” And the martyr who dies for a good cause is all the more a martyr for expecting no opportune rain to quench the fire which is to consume him, no sudden conversion to his principles in the hostile multitude that clamours for his death.

But if we do not believe that it is generally safe to expect providential interventions on behalf of the weak against the strong, we need not at once adopt what is called the “brute force theory” of history. Those who perceive the mischief that has been done by well-meaning

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weakness, and the perishable character of much good work that was not marked by prudence and decision, are apt to look upon strength, whether of body, of mind, or of will, as the one final determinant in human affairs. They need not adopt in its brutal simplicity the maxim that "Providence is always on the side of the biggest battalions"—or rather, they may go behind that maxim, and admit that what makes battalions big is not mere force, but nobler qualities, such as firmness, habits of obedience,—it may be the consciousness of a good cause. But even so, they are likely to identify the virtue that prevails in the long run with virtue (*virtus*) in the original and narrower sense of the word. If, then, their moral standard is such that the gentler virtues have their due place in it, such historians must embrace the melancholy conclusion that in the world the good is generally overborne by the evil, or at least the better by the worse, and if they believe in no other world, they become utter pessimists. But they are more likely to adapt their own moral criterion so as to make their notions of good and evil coincide with those of strong and weak. This is an error into which many historians of very high rank seem to have fallen. Such men can tolerate vice but not feebleness. Their favourite heroes are men like Julius Cæsar, Henry VIII., Frederick the Great, and those who opposed these heroes for the sake of moral principles they brand as fools and pedants. If such a warping of the moral judgment were a necessary result of the study of history, we might hesitate to recommend the study to any but the strongest minds.

But there is another and more popular view, which I may call the organic view of history, according to which the whole system of things is so arranged, whether by the action of a superintending power or through the

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natural process by which man adapts himself to his environment while his environment reacts on him, that what is good must always ultimately prevail, what is bad become eliminated. This view is not merely an attractive one to those who are full of hope and energy. It involves so much that is true in theory, so much that is inspiring in practice, that it is likely always to be held by a large number of thinkers and workers. For it is evident to all of us, except in our most pessimistic moods, that human progress is a fact—that the development of the human race has, on the whole, been an advance from the lower to the higher. We cannot seriously doubt that with the progress of ages man has gained in material comfort, in intellectual power, in moral insight. We feel that there is soundness in the analogy drawn between humanity and any familiar living organism, as assimilating what favours and rejecting what impedes its growth; and our knowledge that many of the difficulties which impeded progress in past days have been ultimately surmounted leads us to anticipate for man yet greater victories over more serious difficulties in the future. And the consciousness that we each have our place in this living and growing organism, and have each our task to perform in helping forward the development of the whole, is indeed a motive to brave and energetic action. Still this view, if not supplemented by a reference to some standard higher than that of actual humanity, is deficient in many ways. It directs our attention to a certain number of truths, but would have us disregard some stubborn facts which ever and anon force themselves on our notice. The shallow optimism which worships progress is apt to neglect many dangers which are the actual result of progress, such as the demoralising spread of luxury, the hideous overgrowth of

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cities, the crushing problems presented by over-population. They also underrate the tremendous cost at which that progress is often obtained. Not only must countless individuals—who were not without noble qualities and capacities for the development of yet nobler—have succumbed in the struggle for existence, but in human progress, as in the development of lower forms, Nature hardly appears as even “careful of the type.” Amiable races of men, admirable systems of social and political life, noble schools of art and of thought, even types of moral excellence, are ruthlessly swept away in the course of centuries, and are never likely to be entirely recovered. Those who hold the “Religion of Humanity” may indeed teach a lesson to all the world in their loving reverence for the great dead, their gratitude to past generations, and their sense of obligation towards those that are to come. But if we regard humanity, according to their principles, as comprising all men as they are and as they tend to be—not as representing men as they should be—we see in it many elements that are by no means worthy of worship, and no amount of study of the laws of human progress can help us to separate the bad from the good. In the history of the past, we see progress, but we often see retrogression, we see ebb and flow, action and reaction. And how can we, from the small section given to us, calculate the shape of the orbit which humanity is to describe? A too confident belief in progress is likely to produce an exaggerated estimate of a limited number of good tendencies which we see working around us, and a weakening moral subserviency to what we regard as the spirit of the age.

Nor are fewer objections to be brought to the theory which would use its belief in progress as basis for a

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belief in a supreme controlling power—to theistic optimism. For if we ask ourselves honestly whether the whole course of human history, so far as our faculties can comprehend it, bears traces of having been arranged with a view to the preservation of that which is good and the destruction of that which is bad, at the least possible cost in pain and labour,—whether the plan of the world is the plan of a benevolent and all-powerful ruler,—we cannot profess to see that it is so. The theistic argument from purpose in history is very much like the theistic argument from design in nature. Both fall far short of proving what they attempt to prove. A certain wise Spanish king is reported to have said that if he had been present on the days of the creation, he would have managed things much better. We may stigmatise this utterance as blasphemous, yet it is but a *reductio ad absurdum* of the crude anthropomorphism which would make everything in heaven and earth square with our own notions, and would regard the universe of men and things as the device of an artificer working on human plans and methods. But the world of nature cannot be so explained, still less can the world of man. As a clever biologist may point out defects in the structure of organic beings which render them liable to fall into disorder and disease, as he sees what looks like wanton waste of material and of life at every step in evolution, so the speculative historian may think that if he had had the ordering of the whole course of history, he would have saved mankind from many troubles. We may think that we should not have allowed the two noblest races of the old Greeks to wear out their finest qualities in mutual destruction. We should not have brought the Romans into contact with the Greeks at a time when their original genius was so imperfectly

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developed as to be easily swamped, and when they were only too ready to assimilate the worse elements in an advanced culture. We should not have let the ancient fabric of civilisation go to decay with the loss of so much that was excellent. We should have cherished the seeds of liberty and enlightenment which so often in the course of the Middle Ages sprang up and perished for lack of soil. We would have suffered no free peoples to fall beneath Turkish tyranny or Austrian bureaucracy. We would not have permitted the red races of the West Indies to die out, wretched and demoralised, to make way for men who were stronger, but often not originally better than themselves. If, as some deep thinkers have shown, the theism which would be suggested by the aspect of external nature only could never amount to a belief in the creation and disposition of things by an unlimited power exerted from pure benevolence, it is equally true that a study of the course of history could never in itself lead us to believe in a government of the world on what would seem to us to be perfectly philanthropic principles.

But all this does not in the very least imply that there is no Divine idea running through history nor that it is unreasonable to believe in a moral government of the world. It simply brings us to the very ancient truth that man cannot "by searching find out God" either in science or in history, though both may be confirming witnesses to Him in the minds of those who, on grounds derived from consciousness or from authority, believe in Him already. Neither from Nature nor from Man can we learn that God is good. But that need not prevent us from attributing to God all that is good in Man or in Nature. For there is another view, different from any of those I have tried to sketch, which seems to combine

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all the truths discerned by those who have derived moral teaching from history—I mean the view of what is sometimes called religious idealism. It is quite beyond the scope of the present paper—and beyond that of the present writer—to explain exactly all that is meant by this term. But I would just indicate its chief characteristic—which is that while the common view takes the outward events and series of observed changes as the real things, and tries to deduce from them the existence of moral purpose or of a guiding will, idealism makes all things of human life and all things of nature which are discerned by the senses or inferred by the understanding to be a mere shadow of the realities which are spiritual and which all material things and events dimly shadow forth. As the great poet regarded all Nature as the “garment of God,” so the idealist-historian may regard the whole course of history as a manifestation of the Divine goodness, higher and, in some respects, clearer than any afforded in non-human nature, but imperfect according to the imperfection of the faculties by which we discern it.

The idealist standpoint is not easy to attain, but if we could attain it we might be free from many of the difficulties that at present beset us. The ordinary optimist must feel his faith shaken if he fails to see some prospect, however distant, of an actual realisation of his dearest hopes—hopes for his own people, or the good cause, or humanity at large. The idealist will probably believe in progress likewise, will hope that the manifestation of the Divine idea will become clearer and clearer as time goes on, but he knows that time and space belong, after all, to the mind of the percipient, that they do not belong to the nature of things, and that even if, before the time that this earth either becomes a cold and

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lifeless mass or rushes to be absorbed in the sun, it may not be possible to display to man a Kingdom of God set up on Earth, such a possibility in no way touches the allegiance of the subjects of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Nor ought any failures or retrogressions in the course of human progress to lessen our courage or our faith. As one of our greatest historians has said, "the world has grown wise by the experience of failure rather than by the winning of high aims." And even if it were not so, who are we that we should presume to judge what has succeeded and what has failed? The natural and pious expressions of old times are still suitable to our feelings. No criticism of the mechanism of the universe or of the human body can destroy the conviction that "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork" and that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made." No mournful spectacle of futile efforts and wasted lives can lessen the confidence expressed in the words, "Lord, Thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another." Of course I do not mean to say that only philosophic idealists can rise to a true—though partial—apprehension of the meaning of their own lives and of those of their fathers as forming part of a divinely ordered plan. Many with no pretensions to philosophy at all have acted their parts faithfully, feeling sure that the course they had to pursue had been mapped out for them and that the strength by which they were to pursue it came to them from beyond themselves, and realising also that the power which sustained them was the same as that which had supported all good efforts, great and small, in all past times.

But to turn from general principles to particular applications, let us look at a few of the moral lessons

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conveyed by history to those who come to it prepared and expecting to see in it some fragmentary manifestation of the Divine Idea. One lesson which historians ought to learn—and which probably more of them would learn if the whole study had not been so shamefully abused by party spirit to party ends—is to be tolerant and charitable in passing judgments. When we see, in past times, what admirable deeds were done by men who not only thought differently from ourselves, but were often infected by vices to which we have no temptation: when, on the other hand, we see men with whom we feel in almost entire sympathy committing what we can see to have been intellectual or moral blunders, we become, or ought to become, less inclined to set up a rigid standard of judgment for our fellow-men whether living or dead. Another result of a historical training is to produce a modest diffidence with regard to schemes and plans that commend themselves to our reason when we realise how often the most excellent schemes have failed in practice through no conspicuous fault in the originator, but because most of the problems of society are too hard to be solved by any individual mind. Again, we learn, or should learn, not to be elated by visions of progress nor depressed unduly when affairs seem to be taking the most lamentable course. For ever and anon in the world's history when things seem to be going from bad to worse it has come true, according to the phrase, that God has not left Himself without a witness. Some help has arisen in an unexpected quarter and a stream of new life and vigour has arisen under a new, incalculable influence. This is pre-eminently the case in the history of the Christian Church. It is beyond my purpose, and would be a large task indeed, to enumerate the various alternations of decline and revival

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in spiritual life and energy which seems to have been communicated in ways baffling all human powers to foresee, and which has been continued in never-ceasing varieties of form.

These are but a few specimens of the moral lessons of history. Others will occur to every mind, and more may be expected as the study broadens and deepens. It may be as well to endeavour to gather together the principal thoughts on the relations of morals and history which I have been trying, though most inadequately, to put before you. The conclusions to which we seem to have come are, first, that history should be studied for its own sake and not for the sake of any moral lessons that it may afford, and that morals should be regarded as having a basis of their own quite apart from any theories of historical development—that what *ought* to be can never be discerned from what *has* been. Further, that if we try to interpret history in a moral sense we must not imagine that we can grasp the whole plan of history in our minds or form an adequate conception of the whole course of human development. We must beware of pointing to successes and failures as indicative of a judgment of Providence for or against any designs or actions of men and nations. We may believe in progress, but need not hastily assume that all social changes, even if a necessary phase in progress, are entirely beneficial and never destructive of anything good. On the whole, the moral teaching of history is but that of ordinary life set before us on a grander scale. As we find that certain experiences of life make some men more humble, more charitable, more confident and hopeful, while similar experiences seem to make others despairing, distrustful, and apathetic, so it depends on the character and tone of mind of the historian, on the

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attitude in which he places himself towards his fellow-men, living or dead, and towards the highest dictates of his spiritual nature, whether he finds in history a chaos - or a cosmos—not a cosmos which he can adequately comprehend, but one in which he feels that he has his part assigned to him, and the thought of which may always sustain him in earnest work and humble worship. For, after all, it is our feeling that our own lives form a part—though an infinitesimally small part—of the course of human history that leads us to look to history for guidance and encouragement. And if we gain from it a feeling of fellowship with all those who have striven for the right in past times, if it helps us to realise our own littleness and the greatness of the whole to which we belong, if it deepens our reverence and strengthens our loyalty towards goodness in whatever form manifested, it will purify our minds and assist our resolutions, not merely by imparting moral instruction, but rather by opening for us a new channel for the communication of moral and spiritual force.



**XVIII**

***EARLY CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AS SET  
FORTH BY DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE***



## XVIII

### EARLY CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM AS SET FORTH BY DIONYSIUS THE AREO- PAGITE

**I**F we try to reckon up the number of teachers and thinkers whose words, written or reported, have wielded a spiritual power down through all the ages and kindled a reverent gratitude in the hearts of many readers and hearers, we find that not a few of these spiritual benefactors are unknown to us as to outward life and even as to name. Yet the circumstance that their works have borne no name, or else a false name, diminishes but little the vividness with which we realise their personality, and seem to grasp their hands in pure friendship. This applies chiefly to the unknown writers of great works of poetry and religion. No acuteness of Homeric criticism can quench our feeling towards the unknown poet who touched the deepest chords of love and grief in showing how the wrath of Achilles yielded to the prayer of Priam. In a less degree we feel that we should like to meet, in the flesh, the writer of the "Ballad of Chevy Chase." But those who speak to the inmost soul, and flood it with the light they have reached by a toilsome upward march, are yet more closely bound to us in a common spiritual life wherein the weak may

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be made partakers with the strong. Two of the greatest spiritual products of the Middle Ages are practically anonymous—the “*Imitatio Christi*” and the “*Theologia Germanica*.” Yet the writer of the former treatise is as real to us as St. Francis, and the author of the “*Theologia*,” only known as a “*Friend of God*” (“*Freund Gottes*”), is notably a friend to us. In both these cases the process of impersonation, if I may so call it, is helped by the typical character of the works, since both represent in its highest and purest light, apart from ceremonial or mythological adjuncts, the mediæval ideal of faith in Christ in an expression suitable to the lives of the recluse and of the layman respectively. Typical also of a certain form of thought and feeling, unknown as to authorship and even as to *provenance*, are the works commonly known as those of Dionysius the Areopagite.

Pseudonymous writings have with us a disadvantage as compared with anonymous: we have to clear away a feigned personality before we can reach the true one, and we have all along a feeling that the real person cannot be a genuine man, since he chose to wear the mask of another. But here we must remember two things: First, that the notion as to the evil of plagiarism and the duty of strict accuracy in assigning works to their rightful authors was very imperfectly developed among the Christian writers of early times; and secondly, that among pseudonymous writings the artificial element may sometimes be distinguished from the natural. The artificial element is certainly very palpable in some of the letters attributed to Dionysius, supposed to have been written by him to Titus, Polycarp, and others. In an age in which rhetorical compositions were the chief educational exercises of the young and

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the delight of literary men, letters and speeches of historical or fictitious persons were much in vogue, but were perhaps no more delusive in intention than such works as Lander's "Imaginary Conversations." And even if in the more serious treatises of the pseudo-Dionysius we find references to untrustworthy tradition treated as fact, these need not make us regard those treatises as a mere forgery. Whether the ideas in them seemed suitable to the character and position of the original Dionysius at Athens (mentioned in Acts xvii. 34), and therefore the pseudo-biographical allusions were put in for the sake of completeness by those who wanted to father a foundling on an illustrious person; or whether some pious mystic chose to put his thoughts and those of his school into a quasi-dramatic form, as uttered by a fictitious character of Church tradition, can matter little to us if we desire simply to know what those thoughts were, and to enter into the mind in which they arose.

But before we take up these thoughts we must look briefly at the Dionysius of hagiology. The name, of course, is familiar as that of one of the few followers whom St. Paul gained in Athens, after the discourse on Mars' Hill concerning the "Unknown God." Dionysius, the story runs, was already prepared to receive the Gospel, by having been deeply impressed, while in the city of Heliopolis, by the supernatural eclipse on the day of the Passion, when "there was darkness over the earth from the sixth hour unto the ninth hour." He received spiritual enlightenment and instruction from a certain Hierotheus, who is quoted in the Dionysian writings more than once, and to whom, strangely enough, rather than to St. Paul, the writer is made to look as his chief master. He was made by St.

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Paul bishop of Athens, though he consorted also with the other apostles, and was present with them after the death of the Virgin Mary. Subsequently he came on a mission to Gaul, and was martyred in Paris with two companions. The strange inconsistencies of this story were in part detected even in the early days of mediæval culture, and one of the doctrines for which the critical Abelard suffered persecution, one which probably brought stronger forces against him than did any theory as to Universals and Particulars, was the impossibility that St. Denys of Paris should be identical with the hearer of St. Paul. The same want of consistency is to be found in the pretensions made for the Dionysian writings. Though, if written in the first century, they would have furnished weapons and material for many theological controversies of many succeeding days, they are not quoted by any sect before 532 A.D. Moreover, in them Ignatius and Clement are quoted as authorities, a patent anachronism which, like most absurdities, the cleverness of biassed apologists can easily clear away. But to the ordinary critical reader it seems quite impossible that the writings should be those of an immediate follower of St. Paul. Their theology, so far as it is scriptural at all, is Johannine rather than Pauline, and the whole tone is that of an atmosphere in which Greek and Christian ideas had long been acting and reacting on one another. Moreover, they depict a system of Church organisation too highly developed for apostolic times. But it is not at all impossible—nay, highly probable—that those who realised the dramatic situation in which the Jew of Tarsus was brought face to face with the ritual and thought of the “School-mistress of Greece” should choose the one name given of a hearer on the Areopagus as that of the chief

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mediator between the rising spiritual light in the East and the paling intellectual glory of the Western world.

For the present this negative criticism must suffice us. As to the actual origin of the books, Vacherot, the learned and delightful historian of the "School of Alexandria," as well as the famous German critic, Ferdinand Baur, would place it in Athens, because they see in them traces of the teaching of Proclus, one of the latest Neo-Platonic philosophers at Athens. Dr. Westcott, however (in an interesting paper in the *Contemporary Review*, 1867), thinks that they came from Syria, where the Monophysite heresy—that which denied the double nature of Christ—took its rise. Certainly it was a Monophysite sect that first appealed to their authority. They were, however, before long recognised as orthodox both in the East and in the West. In the reign of Charles the Bald, about the middle of the ninth century, they were, at the express request of that monarch, translated into Latin by the learned and original Irishman, John the Scot.\* Their influence seems to have been considerable on some part of the teaching of the great systematiser of mediæval theology, St. Thomas Aquinas, and they furnished much of the imagery used by Dante. And the tree which stretches its fruit-laden branches far out from the central trunk had its roots deeply embedded in the rich soil of the past.

That Christianity should be regarded as a philosophy—the deepest and truest of philosophies—seemed quite necessary and natural to the Greek or Græco-Oriental

\* For a fuller treatment of the adoption of the Dionysian system by Scotus I would refer to my little book, "Studies in John the Scot."

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thinkers who first fell under its sway. True, St. Paul had said that his preaching was "to the Greeks foolishness," but the religion of the early apologists was far more elaborate than that of St. Paul, and there were many aspiring minds to whom the depreciation of human wisdom expressed by the apostles was no unwelcome idea, since the highest thought of that day, like that of our own, had realised its own limitations, and could endorse the statement that "the world by wisdom knew not God." Of the later philosophies of the Greeks, it may be said that they were almost religions, and thus there seems nothing incongruous in the view of Christianity and even of Judaism as philosophies. This remark applies especially to Neo-Platonism and to the various eclectic schools that carried on, in a mystic sense, a partial interpretation of the teachings of early philosophers. One would hardly dare to say that the later Platonists were more religious than the "divine" Plato himself; they would themselves have shrunk from such a thought. But, whether from the lack of healthy human activity or from an overpowering sense of human impotence in speculation and in moral aspiration, they had come to dwell more exclusively on the contemplation of the mysterious and the Divine. The God to whom their thoughts aspired was more than Creator, for the theory of an artificer involves something on which the artificer operates outside himself, and there is nothing outside God. He is more than Reason or Wisdom, since He is above all comprehension, nor can we ascribe to Him Virtue or Power except in so far as noble and strong action can only be accomplished by participation in His nature. That such participation should be more and more craved by the human soul even as it discerns more clearly the infinite

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superiority of the Eternal One to the transitory manifold is a paradox ever pressing for solution. An explanation was sought in a series of emanations, by which the Divine life communicates itself to the inferior grades of being, all of which, in so far as they have being, are of the Divine, and capable of receiving in some degree the rays of the supersensual light. Man, in his threefold nature (sometimes described as intelligence, reason, and perception), may, by abjuring the sensual and rising to the philosophic life, attain in moments of ecstasy to the fruition of the Godhead.

But while Greek thought, with some Oriental admixtures, was thus advancing towards what may, perhaps, be called a spiritual theosophy, the nation among whom Christianity arose had reached, by other paths, a highly theologic view of the universe and of man's place therein. A sect of enlightened Jews, followers of Philo and generally connected with the schools of Alexandria, helped to build the Neo-Platonic fabric, the temple to the immanent yet super-intellectual, the infinitely remote yet all-pervading Deity. But Alexandrian Judaism was more unlike Judaism in its essence than Neo-Platonism was unlike the original doctrine of Plato. In fact, it took little root among the Jews themselves, whose spiritual development generally followed quite different lines. From the first the Jewish conception of God had been that of One not immanent in all things and informing all with a Divine life, but ruling over all, jealously bringing to nought the gods of the heathen, guiding, by chastisement in season and by blessing in return for obedience, the people whom He had chosen for Himself. And when the national barrier was broken down, and a small band of Jews set forth to proclaim the new "Kingdom of God," it was a Power directing, rather

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than informing, nature and man whom they invoked and taught, One who had shown His power in raising Jesus from the dead, and who would shortly send Him again to judge the world, One who, while He was in men in that He strengthened His saints by His spirit, was also above them to direct their ways and to punish the misdeeds of the wicked. It is true that a participation in the Divine life was essential to them as to the religious philosophers. Nor was it attained by them only in occasional moments of rapture. Rather was it a perpetual fact, symbolised in the eucharistic feast, and taking form in the organisation of a new society. But it assumed among Christians the character of a more personal relation, a realisation of that sonship which had been revealed or established by their Master who, being Son of God, had redeemed human nature from the dominion of sin.

It may indeed seem to us, looking back through the ages, as if these two ideas of the Supreme, the immanent and the transcendent, were inconsistent, perhaps mutually antagonistic. But human thought is seldom consistent with itself, especially in the region of theology. In the Middle Ages, and even in modern times, we find in people's minds a blending of the two conceptions,—of a Divine power manifested in nature and in all that is best in man, and of a Divine lawgiver controlling men and all things. Both views are needful for us purblind mortals, who can only receive one small fragment of the truth at a time. It is because the Greek view predominated in Dionysius that he has accomplished a valuable service to the Church and to the thought of Christendom.

Of course I would not say that it is only through the Dionysian writings that Greek theology has found its entrance among us. The doctrine of Philo the Jew, and

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of Plotinus, Proclus, and their Hellenic and Syrian followers, had a great influence on the Alexandrian fathers of the Church, and especially on Clement and Origen. But just because Clement and Origen were more distinctively Christian in their thoughts and expressions, the mystic, universal, indefinite system of the supposed Areopagite has always had a peculiar, even fascinating, interest, far more than proportionate to its immediate influence.

There is one point which distinguishes the two systems we have contrasted in which Dionysius is evidently among the Hellenes. This relates to the existence of evil. Jewish and, on the whole, Christian theology admit the real existence of evil as the work of depraved spirits hostile to the purposes of the Almighty. But if God be regarded as the beginning and end of all being, how can anything in existence militate against His purpose? The Neo-Platonic answer is: That evil has no real existence.\* It should be regarded as a weakness, a deviation from good, having no power in itself actively to strive against the good. It were vain to seek for it in the Universe, the everlasting order of which precludes internal contention; or in spirits which execute righteous chastisement, or in evil men who, in so far as they are strong, show in themselves a good and Divine element; or in brute beasts, whose brutality is, in them, normal and rightful; or in matter itself, which is capable of participating in the Divine order. Evil is but self-destructive and barren, having no inherent force: that is, in truth it is not. Yet, how explain the declension from the good? Here we have the ancient and never-ending problem of the antithesis of Divine Providence and human sin, and the old and new solution, never

\* "Div. Nom.," iv. 80 *et seq.*

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quite satisfactory to the intellect, of human freedom. It has often been said that the idea of evil as a mere negation is inconsistent with a practical hatred of the low and malicious, and a genuine devotion to the power that redeems from evil. Yet the contrast between evil and good comes out nowhere more clearly than in the expositions of Dionysius in which the power and glory of the one, the wretchedness and futility of the other, are set forth. If hatred of the non-existent seems to be a passion of which we are incapable, yet the earnest longing after the highest existence, the fullest measure of life and energy, must involve an abhorrent impatience of anything which might weaken our power of attaining thereto. This, however, is a question of actual life and experience, and does not come into the philosophy of Dionysius. And in fact the doctrine of Redemption he seems, for a Christian, to hold in a rather feeble grasp.

Another consequence of the refusal to acknowledge any active power of evil is a glorious optimism, which Christian thinkers naturally felt to be inconsistent with Scriptural teaching, though followers of Dionysius, some centuries later, expressed it with exultant confidence. For in the final consummation of all things, when God shall be all in all, evil shall appear no more, and all creatures, men and even demons, who, *quâ* existent, are fundamentally good, shall not be delivered over to perpetual destruction, but purified and united with God. If this view had prevailed, the lurid light of the Infernal region would not have cast its gloom over mediæval religion. But even Dante, with all his reverence for the Areopagite, had to rest content with the belief that the everlasting punishment of the greater number of mankind was an act of the Divine justice.

If we glance briefly at the modes in which the views

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of the Areopagite are set forth, we see how the combination of ideas from various nations and schools of thought is effected. Several of the treatises seem to have been lost. What remain are the "Divine Names," the "Mystic Theology," the "Celestial Hierarchy," the "Ecclesiastical Hierarchy," and various letters purporting to be written to eminent persons of apostolic or post-apostolic times. Of the treatises, the "Divine Names" and "Mystic Theology" set forth his doctrine of God, along with the ways in which man may name or conceive of God, and a digression on the nature of evil. The "Celestial Hierarchy" treats of the orders of creatures through which the Divine Being communicates with the inferior creation. The "Ecclesiastical Hierarchy" traces in the order of the Church a copy of that which subsists in the heavens. 天秩

I have said that, generally speaking, Greek philosophy attained to belief in an immanent God, while the Jewish and Christian religions set forth a God dwelling above the world and ruling it. One must, however, avoid pressing the distinction too far. The idea of a transcendent God is regarded as specially characteristic of Plato. The Psalmist thought of One about his path and about his bed, spying out all his ways; the Apostle spoke of a "God and Father of all, above all and *through* all, and *in* you all." And on the other hand, one of the noblest religious utterances of antiquity was the hymn of Cleanthes the Stoic to "The most glorious of the Immortals, Zeus the many-named, the Ordainer of Nature." Of course the different ways in which, in the course of his intellectual progress, man has regarded *nature*, has modified his statements as to the relation in which it stands to God. Dionysius is not entirely self-consistent here, since he emphatically speaks of God as

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*above* nature, yet, in a sense, as being *in* nature, imparting to it being and life, calling into being what does not yet exist, and maintaining the orderly progress of that which He has caused to be.

When he treats (as in the "Mystical Theology") of God in Himself, apart from man and nature, he is necessarily reduced to mere negation. Thus he says,\* "He is neither soul nor mind; He has neither imagination, nor opinion, nor word, nor thought; nor is He word or thought; He uttereth no word and thinketh no thought; neither is He number, nor order, nor greatness, nor littleness, nor equality, nor any quality, nor likeness, nor difference; He standeth not, nor moveth He, neither does He take rest; He hath not power, nor is He power, nor light; He liveth not, neither is He life; He is not being, nor eternity, nor time; neither is He within touch of reason; He is not skill, nor is He truth, nor dominion, nor wisdom; neither one, nor unity, nor divinity, nor goodness nor yet spirit, as known to us; neither sonship, nor fatherhood, nor any thing that is known to us or to any other beings; neither is He of the things that are nor of those that are not; neither do the things that are know Him in that He is, nor doth He know the things that are in that they are; neither doth any word pertain to Him, nor name, nor thought; He is neither darkness nor light, neither error nor truth; neither is there for Him any place, nor any removal; for when we place and when we remove those things that come after Him, we do not so with Him; for the perfect and unifying Cause is beyond any place, and the Excellent Simplicity withdrawn from all things is beyond any taking away, and stands apart from all things."

This attempt at the purest negation may seem to

\* "De Myst. Theol.," end.

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break down in the use of the word *cause*. But even if it could be quite consistently carried out, it might be regarded as a contribution of doubtful value to theological or any other thought. As reminding us of the relativity of our knowledge, it may, however, be not altogether useless.

But we seem to tread on somewhat firmer, if still quaking ground, when we come to see by what names our philosopher would denote the Nameless One, and in what way he would allow that the impotence of thought might reach to the contemplation of the Divine. It is evident from the negative conclusion, just pointed out, that all our thoughts of God, and the attributes we mentally apply to Him, must be symbolic in character. The names of God are admissible as having a significance of a mystic kind. But where is our authority for using any names at all? In Scripture, and in the theologians, is the reply of our philosopher. This is of course a most unsatisfactory answer; as Dionysius is very eclectic in his citations from Scripture and free in his interpretations, showing some impatience of expositors who regard the letter rather than the spirit, nor can we tell how he would specially distinguish those theologians whose judgment is worthy of acceptance. It is plain, however, throughout his writings that no inward voice can do more than corroborate that which speaks within the soul. "All divine things," he says, "in so far as they are manifested to us, are known only by participation therein."\* He sees around him an ordered universe, the harmony and beauty of which, as well as its stability and ceaseless motion, he attributes to a principle which works also in himself, producing a desire after that which is best and most enduring. To

\* "Div. Nom.," iv. 11.

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this Unknown, Unnamed—which he dares not even term *Being*—he feels an affinity, in that he recognises (in his own words again) a “power, by which we are joined in a way that passes speech or comprehension to the Unspeakable and Unknowable, in that union which is stronger than any strength of mind or intellect.”\*

But in this secret union with the Divine man still desires to express, with necessary imperfection, that which he enjoys, and to celebrate the Divine glory, which he can only do by the application of such attributes as have been communicated to holy men and handed down by them to us. The language used bears the same relation to the Divine facts as does our figurative expression of the things of the intellect in terms of sense to those supersensuous things themselves. In holy words, man is inspired to celebrate God as “cause, beginning, being, the awakening and setting up of the fallen, the renewal and restoration of the declining, the assurance of waverers, the security of the steadfast, the guidance of those turned towards Him, the light of the illuminated, the perfection of the initiated, the divinity of those conformed to God, the simplicity of the simple, the unity of those that are made one, dominion above dominion, and being of all dominion, the gracious bestowal, according to fitness, of that which is hidden, the being of beings, the beginning and cause of life and being, through the goodness by which all things together are fruitful and multiply and hold together in One.” Also we may use as Divine names expressions made by some particular prophet or seer—the arm of God, the eyes of the Lord, Thy throne, and the like; and similarly those derived from the conception of a Divine Providence, as King, Creator, Almighty; or, less

\* “Div. Nom.,” i.

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generally, such as King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Ancient of Days. Into the symbolic meaning of these names and some others Dionysius enters more or less at length. Especially he rests, after some apologies, on the idea of God as love, which he interprets both in the sense of *erōs* and in that of *agapē*, for of God is that passionate longing after the excellent and beautiful, and the giving up of self into the possession of another, by which the diverse are made one and the imperfect are drawn upwards to true perfection.

Dionysius does not take the Trinity as one of the names of God. He seems to consider that generally the attributes of one of the persons of the Trinity are permissible in regard to the other two. Yet he recognises a distinction, which he illustrates by comparing the Father to a stem, of which the Son and the Spirit are offshoots. Here, however, he again cautions us against a too literal and pseudo-accurate definition. The fatherhood and sonship in God are typified by the sonship of man in relation to Him. For "of Him every family (or fatherhood) in heaven and earth is named." Whether he would say the same of the human relations of parent and child, so as to make all earthly parentage a reflex of the heavenly, is not quite clear. It appears that he has treated the questions of the Trinity and the Incarnation more fully in one of the treatises which have been lost. It would be interesting to see with which of the threefold divisions \* of human nature in vogue among Platonists and Neo-Platonists he would bring his doctrine into closest connection. It may be observed that although Salvation is treated as one of the Divine names, it is dealt with in a much

\* Τὸ νοητικόν, τὸ θυμοειδές, τὸ ἐπιθυμητικόν; νοῦς, λόγος, διάνοια; intellectus, ratio, sensus, &c.

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briefed way than modern theologians, especially Protestants, would think essential.

The various names are not on an equality as regards universal fitness.\* We may more appropriately think of the Most High as being and life than as a rock or a wind. Yet *all* the terms we use must needs be symbolical, and the use of those with less inherent dignity reminds us of this limitation.†

To come now to a somewhat closer view of the relation in which the Supreme stands to man and to nature. It has been said that Creator is one of the names of God, and from the Platonic or Neo-Platonic systems are borrowed the formative powers which, according to one conception of their character, construct, according to another serve as model for, the ordered creation. "We call *παράδειγματα*," he says, "those constructive principles which are united in God, and are in theology named 'predeterminants,' those divine and righteous wills which define and form all beings, according to which He who is above all being has predetermined and brought forth all things."‡

It is again from the Neo-Platonic philosophy that Dionysius derives the series of emanations, divided into triads, by which the strengthening and purifying power of the Eternal is communicated to man. In this philosophy the contemplative life is always regarded as being in itself superior to the active or distributive. Further, that which is passively contemplated or understood is above the contemplating or understanding powers: the *νοετοί* are inferior to the *νοητοί*. While maintaining the use of these terms, Dionysius gives to

\* "De Coel. Hier." i. ; "Myst. Theol.," iii.

† See Essay on Symbolism in Religion.

‡ "De Div. Nom.," v. 8.

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his series of intermediate emanations the names belonging to the late development of Jewish thought on things celestial. These names are easily arranged in threefold fashion: Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim, which are primarily contemplative, yet distribute and communicate their glories to the second triad—Dominions, Virtues, Powers. This second is intermediate between the highest triad and the lowest, that of Principalities, Archangels, and Angels. The angels communicate between heaven and men, one archangel being set over each nation. Michael has the Jews under his special care, but the other peoples are not, as erroneously supposed, given over to false gods, but watched over each by its particular angel (the word *angel* may be generally applied to all members of the hierarchy), and all are able, if willing, to attain to some knowledge of the Divine. Those powers who contemplate, even in the highest, inmost circle, cannot see God as He is, but they behold a Theophany, or manifestation, such as He vouchsafes to grant and they are able to receive. As one commentator says by way of illustration, it was the *glory* of God, not God Himself, that Moses desired to behold.

It might be thought that this series of exalted beings, however ineffectual be the attempt by means of it to bridge the distance between the Holiest and His most perfect creature, would at any rate practically lead the piety of men in a direction contrary to pure monotheism, just as in the Middle Ages, and in some backward parts of the world to-day, saints and angels are of far more account in popular thought and cult than is the Supreme object of worship. But this is not the case with Dionysius. In prayer for illumination, he turns not to seraph nor archangel (whose being is, after all, hardly

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within mental grasp), but to the one Source of Light. Prayer is, for him, a drawing nigh to God, not a bringing of the Almighty down to us. Men in a boat, pulling at the rope which binds them to the shore, draw themselves into harbour; they do not drag the coast down to them. This, be it observed, is not what is called the merely subjective view of prayer. The rock to which the boat is tied stands quite independently of that boat, whether the sailor knows that he draws himself thither by the cable, or whether, in drunken ignorance, he thinks that he is pulling the rock to meet him.

In the treatise on "The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy," Dionysius endeavours to show how the institutions of the Church are modelled on those of the heavens. The three ecclesiastical orders of bishops, priests, and deacons correspond in their mutual relations and respective functions to the heavenly orders already considered. The analogy cannot be adhered to quite closely, for in those days no more than in our own did bishops exercise a purely contemplative function. The threefold division, regarded in relation to the active work of the ministry, is into the several offices of purifying those who would enter the Church, of illuminating those who are learning, and of perfecting those who are near completion.

In chapters which must be of great interest to the ecclesiastical antiquarian, but need not long detain us here, all the ceremony which belongs to the celebration of the sacraments is described in detail and explained in accordance with the principles of the symbolical theology. It follows from the whole character of that theology that the sacraments should be regarded with deep reverence, and yet without any of the materialistic superstition

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which belongs to an unspiritual stage of society. Baptism is the symbol of regeneration, not the very process thereof. The holy Eucharist, the rite of rites, in the celebration of which is figured the highest of all spiritual processes, the union of the soul with God, is not connected with anything even remotely resembling transubstantiation. And the same kind of spiritual interpretation is given to the conferring of holy orders. "This is the common end of every hierarchy, perpetual love to God and to things divine, . . . the knowledge of things in that they are, the vision and understanding of divine truth, the sacred participation in that perfection which maketh One." \*

The modern reader may be tempted to say, after a survey of the Dionysian system: "Lofty sentiments, poetical and reverent ideas, but not much Christianity." It is true that the human, ethical side of the Christian ideal is not very prominent in these writings, but probably the defect is not in the man but in his age. The glories of the Eternal Creative Logos had eclipsed, to the sight of those generations, the human loveliness in the life and teaching of the Galilæan Prophet. In one of the letters, however, which purport to come from the hand of Dionysius (I confess that I cannot help suspecting it of being from another writer than that of the treatises) we have a touch of emotional, almost sentimental, Christianity. The letter† is addressed to a monk who has presumptuously assaulted a bishop for readmitting a penitent to communion, and it exhorts him to obey his superiors and be ready to restore the erring. To illustrate the latter injunction, the writer tells a story of a certain holy man, Carpus of Crete, who was consumed with indignation against a heretic who had turned

\* "Ecol. Hier.," i. 8.

† Ep. VIII.

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a Christian man from the faith, and against the defaulter himself. One night, in a vision after prayer, he beheld the roof of the house rent in twain, and above sat Jesus on His throne, with all the heavenly hosts. And below, a chasm rent the ground, and he saw crawling serpents, and miserable men clinging to the rocks, and trying to escape destruction. In his zeal against the two miscreants he scarcely beheld the glory above, but longed to see due punishment inflicted on those beneath, and was filled with impatience because they were not yet devoured. But suddenly he saw Jesus arise from His throne and descend, with the holy angels, and stretch out a helping hand to the miserable men in the abyss. Then He reached forth his hand to Carpus, saying : " Here is My hand, strike it ; for I am willing to suffer again and that gladly for the salvation of men. . . . But dost thou do well to abide by the chasm and with the serpents rather than with God and with the good angels who love mankind ? "

The Dionysian theology forms rather a backwater than a part of the stream of religious thought in the Middle Ages. Not that it was without influence, as we have seen, but it was too refined and subtle for the ordinary Northern mind, or for those teachers who had to appeal to the grosser sensibilities of their disciples. Men do not care to have symbols of truth or approximations to truth. They wish to have all truths labelled as this or that, put in form which seems intelligible and powerful. If the Greek tone of mind had prevailed more widely, the mental attitude and the general character of the Middle Ages might not have suffered thereby. We have already seen that a less exclusive and pessimistic view as to the future world for the mass of mankind would have become general, and we may add that a

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more reverent and less anthropomorphic way of thinking and speaking of the Most High would have been followed. We should have had less toying with sacred things in mediæval festivals, less gross and material conceptions in worship and ritual down to the present day, less crude assimilation of the Divine to the human in open instruction and in secret thought. Yet, after all, the fittest, not the best in itself, survived. And in a sense the Greek theology hardly deserved to prevail, as it could only maintain its ethical and social side by means of conspicuous logical inconsistencies. Modern thinkers and poets,\* imbued with practical Christianity, have taught men to bow before the great Unknown. Yet a present God that sees and judges, that warns and redeems, is believed in by many who could never grasp the idea of a Supreme Unity. But it is not a modern poet appealing to a critical age, nor yet a mystic theologian standing on the boundary line between ancient and mediæval times who has most briefly and completely set forth the everlasting paradox. Awe of the Infinite Unknown and adoring love of the One Good are blended in the inmost thoughts of the ancient psalmist who wrote: "Clouds and darkness are round about Him; righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne."

\* Cf. A. H. Clough :—

"O thou that in our bosom's shrine  
Dost dwell unknown because divine,

I will not frame one thought of what  
Thou mayest either be or not,  
I will not prate of *thus* and *so*  
Nor be profane with *yes* and *no*.  
Enough that in our soul and heart  
Thou, whatsoe'er Thou mayst be, art."

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